

SCHOOLS COUNCIL PROGRAMME IN
LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH TEACHING
PAPERS SERIES II

Volume 3

Language and social man

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General editor: Stephen Lushington

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M. A. K. Halliday



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Introduction



The Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching consisted of a team of twelve teachers and linguists working together at University College London between 1967 and 1971 under the direction of Professor M. A. K. Halliday, Professor of Linguistics at the College.

At the end of a preliminary stage undertaken by a much smaller team and sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation (1964-7), a series of ten papers was published by Longman in December 1968, together with an annotated reading list. These papers are now referred to as Series I, and form the first of the programme's five main publications.

In the spring of 1970, Longman published *Breakthrough to Literacy*, which resulted from the work of the primary school section of the team. This far-reaching scheme included simple apparatus both for teachers and pupils, and newly written and illustrated readers for the initial teaching of reading and writing.

In the autumn of 1971 Edward Arnold published *Language in Use*, which resulted from the work of the secondary team. This was more than just a book: it consisted of a loose-leaf volume presenting to teachers about 120 lesson units designed to help with language teaching over the whole range of secondary school age, and also colleges of education and further education. This was followed in spring 1972 by a collection of papers, also published by Arnold, entitled *Exploring Language*, which set out and discussed the theoretical background to *Language in Use*.

Finally Longman are publishing this second series of papers. The first series is now largely out of print; much of the thinking that went into its materials has either been embodied in subsequent publications, or has been developed further towards some of the papers in the present series. However, in the case of 'Grammatical Cohesion' by Michael Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, instead of publishing Part II as originally intended in this series, Longman have decided to publish both parts together in their English Language Library.

We are starting this series at the linguistic rather than at the pedagogic end, and the first volume, *Language at work*, contains three papers on how language functions: 'The individual and his development of language' by Geoffrey Thornton (now Inspector for English in Cheshire) shows how children first acquire and use language, and relates this to the working of the brain; in 'You never speak a dead language', David Birk (now working in the Research Institute of Pacific Studies, Canberra) gives an informal account of

the functional theory of language and examines how far the demands users make upon language determine its nature; in the third paper, 'An exercise in linguistic description', Dr. R. A. Hudson (Lecturer in Linguistics at University College London) builds up with great clarity the uniquely complex extra-lingual and linguistic framework which lies behind even a short utterance.

Volume 2 in the series is likely to become a standard work on its subject: *The English writing system: notes towards a description* by K. H. Albrow (now Lecturer in Linguistics at the University College of North Wales at Bangor). Both these first two volumes are of particular interest and value to colleges of education.

We are fortunate to have as Volume 3 a paper from Professor Halliday (now visiting professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle) on *Language and social man*, which will contribute much to an understanding of the vital relationship between the pupil's use of language in the classroom, and his comprehension of his environment.

In the fourth volume we approach the classroom more directly. 'Language studies for the middle years' by Ian Forsyth (now director of the I.L.E.A. Reading Centre), outlines and discusses the work, not published elsewhere, undertaken during 1969-70 by the section of the Programme's team concerned with the middle school. 'English and examinations' by John Pearce (now working as English Adviser to Cambridgeshire), explores the relationship between English Language teaching in the classroom and the present, and possible future, external examinations.

Finally in Volume 5, Peter Doughty and Geoffrey Thornton write together on the all-important subject of competence in English.

Interest in our own language and its teaching, in schools, and in colleges of education and of further education, has become much more widespread. Great advances have been made in the quality of material for teacher and pupil since the first small Nuffield team started work in 1964. The Schools Council, by its faith in the programme at what happily proved to be a half-way stage, has played a major part in promoting a number of these advances and it is certain that others will follow to help learners of all ages and all abilities with the most central 'subject' of all—their own language.

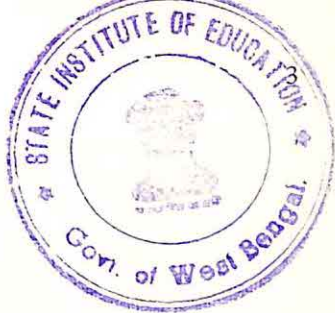
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Language and social man

M. A. K. Halliday

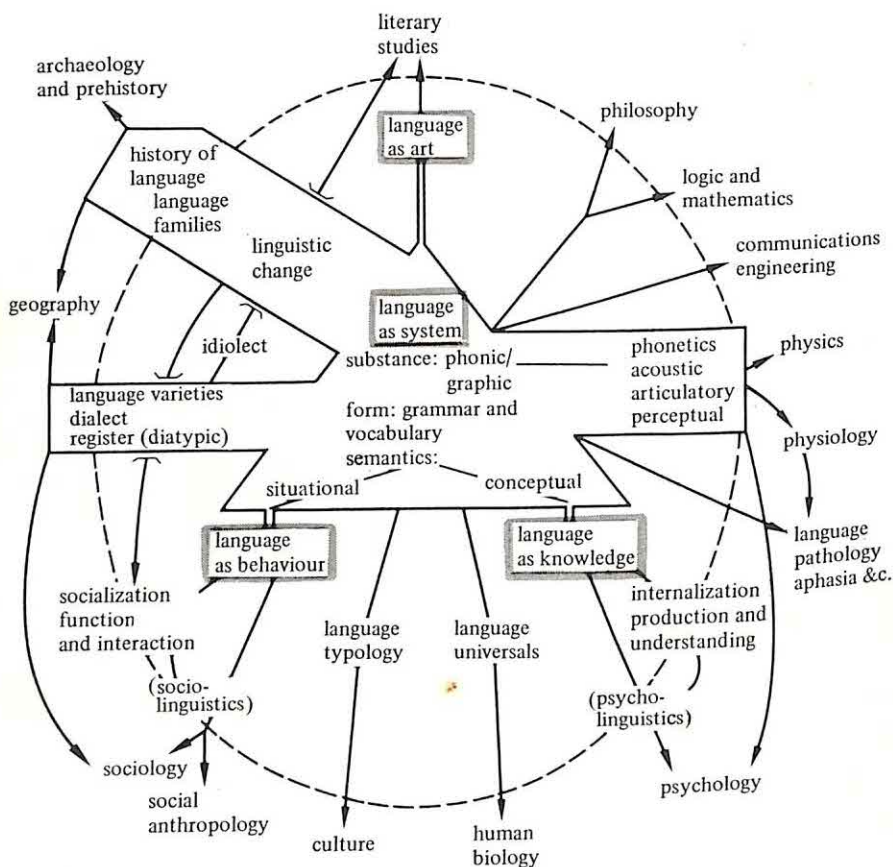


I Language and the environment

If we ever come to look back on the ideology of the 1970s, as suggested by the writer of an imaginary 'retrospect from 1980' published in the *Observer* in the first issue of the decade, we are likely to see one theme clearly standing out, the theme of 'social man'. Not social man in opposition to individual man, but rather the individual in his social environment. What the writer was forecasting—and he seems likely to be proved accurate—was, in effect, that while we should continue to be preoccupied with man in relation to his surroundings, as we were in the sixties, the seventies would show a change of emphasis from the purely physical environment on to the social environment. This is not a new concern, but it has tended up to now to take second place; we have been more involved over the past twenty years with town planning and urban renewal, with the flow of traffic around us and above our heads, and most recently with the pollution and destruction of our material resources. This inevitably has distracted us from thinking about the other part of our environment, that which consists of people—not people as mere quanta of humanity, so many to the square mile, but other individuals with whom we have dealings of a more or less personal kind.

The 'environment' is social as well as physical, and a state of wellbeing, which depends on harmony with the environment, demands harmony of both kinds. The nature of this state of wellbeing is what environmental studies are about. Ten years ago we first came to hear of 'ergonomics', the study and control of the environment in which people work; many will remember London Transport's advertising slogan 'How big is a bus driver?', announcing the design of new buses 'on ergonomic principles'. This was characteristic of the conception of the environment at that time. Today we would find more emphasis laid on the social aspects of wellbeing. No one would assert that the shape of the bus driver's seat is unimportant; but it no longer seems to be the whole story. There are other aspects of environmental design which seem at least as significant, and which are considerably more difficult to adjust.

Consider for example the problem of pollution, the defensive aspect of environmental design. The rubbish creep, the contamination of air and water, even the most lethal processes of physical pollution appear to be more tractable than the pollution in the social environment that is caused by prejudice and animosity of race, culture and class. These cannot be engineered



that if a student is taking linguistics as a university subject he will have to cover this area as a compulsory part of his course, whatever other aspects he may choose to take up. There are then certain projections from the triangle, representing special sub-disciplines within this central area: phonetics, historical linguistics and dialectology—the last of these best thought of in broader terms, as the study of language varieties. These sometimes get excluded from the central region, but probably most linguists would agree in placing them within it; if one could give a three-dimensional representation they would not look like excrescences.

Then, outside this triangle, are the principal perspectives on language that take us beyond a consideration solely of language as a system and, in so doing, impinge on other disciplines. Any

study of language involves some attention to other disciplines; one cannot draw a boundary round the subject and insulate it from others. The question is whether the aims go beyond the elucidation of language itself; and once one goes outside the central area, one is enquiring not only into language but into language in relation to something else. The diagram summarizes these wider fields under the three headings 'language as knowledge', 'language as behaviour', 'language as art'.

The last of these takes us into the realm of literature, which is all too often treated as if it was something insulated from and even opposed to language: 'we concentrate mainly on literature here—we don't do much on language', as if 'concentrating on literature' made it possible to ignore the fact that literature is made of language. Similarly the undergraduate is invited to 'choose between lang. and lit.'. In fact the distinction that is being implied is a perfectly meaningful one between two different emphases or orientations, one in which the centre of attention is the linguistic system and the other having a focus elsewhere; but it is wrongly named, and therefore, perhaps, liable to be misinterpreted. One can hardly take literature seriously without taking language seriously; but language here is being looked at from a special point of view.

The other two headings derive from the distinction we have just been drawing between the intraorganism perspective, language as knowledge, and the interorganism perspective, language as behaviour. These both lead us outward from language as a system, the former into the region of psychological studies, the latter into sociology and related fields. So in putting language into the context of 'language and social man', we are taking up one of the options that are open for the relating of language study to other fields of enquiry. This, broadly, is the sociolinguistic option; and the new subject of sociolinguistics that has come into prominence lately is a recognition of the fact that language and society—or, as we prefer to think of it, language and social man—is a unified conception, and needs to be understood and investigated as a whole. Neither of these exists without the other: there can be no social man without language, and no language without social man. To recognize this is no mere academic exercise; the whole theory and practice of education depends on it, and it is no exaggeration to suggest that much of our failure in recent years—the failure of the schools to come to grips with social pollution—can be traced to a lack of insight into the nature of the relationships between language and society: specifically, of the processes, which are very largely linguistic processes, whereby a human organism turns into a social being.

II Inter-organism and intra-organism perspectives

The diagram in section I suggests a context for language study, placing it in the environment of other fields of investigation. It also suggests where 'language and social man' fits in to the total picture of language study. The discussion of the diagram will perhaps have made it clear (and this harks back to what was said at the beginning) that when we talk of 'social man' the contrast we are making is not that of social versus individual. The contrast is rather that of social versus psychophysiological, the distinction which we have attempted to draw in terms of interorganism and intraorganism perspectives.

When we refer to social man, we mean the individual considered as a single entity, rather than as an assemblage of parts. The distinction we are drawing here is that between the behaviour of that individual, his actions and interactions with his environment (especially that part of his environment which consists of other individuals), on the one hand, and on the other hand his biological nature, and in particular the internal structure of his brain. In the first of these perspectives we are regarding the individual as an integral whole, and looking at him from the outside; in the second we are focusing our attention on the parts, and looking on the inside, into the works. Language can be considered from either of these points of view; the first is what we called on the diagram 'language as behaviour', the second 'language as knowledge'. 'Language and social man' means language as a function of the whole man; hence language man to man (interorganism), or language as human behaviour.

These are two complementary orientations. The distinction between them is not a difficult one to make; in itself it is rather obvious and simple. But it has become complicated by the fact that it is possible to embed one perspective inside the other: to treat language behaviour as if it were an aspect of our knowledge of language (and hence to see it in terms of the capacity of the human brain), and also, though in a rather different sense, to treat the individual's knowledge of language as a form of behaviour. In other words we can look at social facts from a biological point of view, or at biological facts from a social point of view. Let us try and explain this.

The study of language as knowledge is an attempt to find out what goes on inside the individual's head. The question being asked is what are the mechanisms of the brain that are involved in

speaking and understanding, and what must the structure of the brain be like in order for the individual to be able to speak and understand language, and to be able to learn to do so.

Now one important fact about speaking and understanding language is that it always takes place in a context. We do not simply 'know' our mother tongue as an abstract system of vocal signals, or as if it was some sort of a grammar book with a dictionary attached. We know it in the sense of knowing how to use it; we know how to communicate with other people, how to choose forms of language that are appropriate to the type of situation we find ourselves in, and so on. All this can be expressed as 'know how to', as a form of knowledge: we know how to behave linguistically.

Therefore it is possible, and is in fact quite usual in what is nowadays called 'sociolinguistics', to look at language behaviour as a type of knowledge; so that although one's attention is focused on the social aspects of language—on language as communication between organisms—one is still asking what is essentially an intraorganism kind of question: how does the individual *know how to* behave in this way? We might refer to this as psychosociolinguistics: it is the external behaviour of the organism looked at from the point of view of the internal mechanisms which control it.

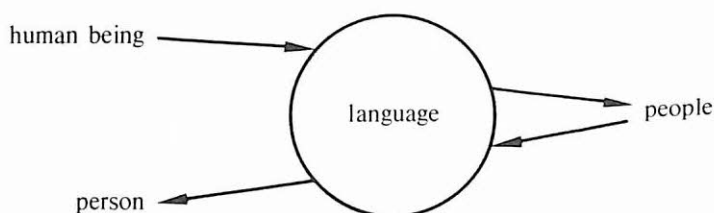
We said above that the two perspectives were complementary, and it would be reasonable to conclude that they are really inseparable one from the other. But if so the inseparability holds in both directions. It is true that the individual's potential for linguistic interaction with others implies certain things about the internal make-up of the individual himself. But the converse is also true. The fact that the brain has the capacity to store language and use it for effective communication implies that communication takes place: that the individual has a 'behaviour potential' which characterizes his interaction with other individuals of his species.

Since no doubt the human brain evolved in its present form through the process of human beings communicating with one another, the latter perspective is likely to be highly significant from an evolutionary point of view. But that is not our main point of departure here. There is a more immediate sense in which the individual, considered as one who can speak and understand and read and write, who has a 'mother tongue', needs to be seen in a social perspective. This concerns the part that language has played in his own development as an individual. Let us start with the notion of the individual human organism, the human being as a biological specimen. Like the individual in many other species, he is destined to become one of a group; but unlike those of all other species, he achieves this—not wholly, but critically—through language. It is by means of language that the

'human being' becomes one of a group of 'people'. But 'people', in turn, consist of 'persons'; by virtue of his participation in a group the individual is no longer simply a biological specimen of humanity—he is a person. Again language is the essential element in the process, since it is largely the linguistic interchange with the group that determines the status of the individuals and shapes them as persons. The picture is:

INDIVIDUAL

GROUP

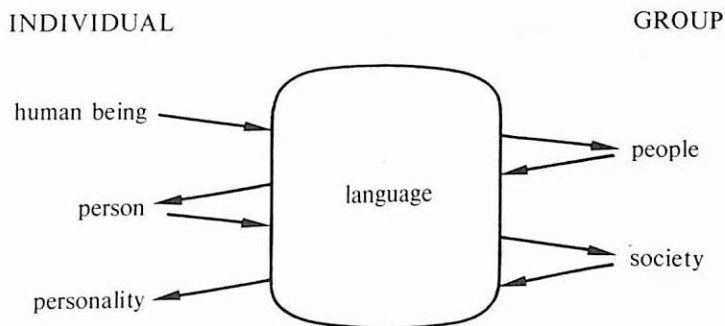


In other words, instead of looking at the group as a derivation from and extension of the biologically endowed mental powers of the individual, we explain the nature of the individual as a derivation from and extension of his participation in the group. Instead of starting inside the organism and looking outwards, we can adopt a Durkheimian perspective and start from outside the organism in order to look inwards.

But when we do adopt this perspective it becomes apparent that we can take the dialectic one stage further, and that when we do so language will still remain the crucial factor. The individual as a 'person' is now a potential 'member': he has the capacity to function within society, and once more it is through language that he achieves this status. How does a society differ from a group, as we conceive it here? A group is a simple structure, a set of participants among whom there are no special relations, only the simple coexistence that is implied by participation in the group. A society, on the other hand, does not consist of participants but of relations, and these relations define social roles. Being a member of society means occupying a social role; and it is again by means of language that a 'person' becomes potentially the occupant of a social role.

Social roles are combinable, and the individual, as a member of a society, occupies not just one role but many at a time, always through the medium of language. Language is again a necessary condition for this final element in the process of the development of the individual, from human being to person to what we may call 'personality', a personality being interpreted as a role

complex. Here the individual is seen as the configuration of a number of roles defined by the social relationships in which he enters; from these roles he synthesizes a personality. Our model now looks like this:



Let us now interpret this in terms of a perspective on language. We have gone some way round in order to reach this particular angle of vision, certainly oversimplifying the picture and perhaps seeming to exaggerate the importance of language in the total process. The justification for this is that we have been trying to achieve a perspective that will be most relevant in an educational context. From this point of view, language is the medium through which a human being becomes a personality, in consequence of his membership of society and his occupancy of social roles. The concept of language as behaviour, as a form of interaction between man and man, is turned around, as it were, so that it throws light on the individual: the formation of the personality is itself a social process, or a complex of social processes, and language—by virtue of its social functions—plays the key part in it. Hence just as the view of language as knowledge, which is essentially an individual orientation, can be used to direct attention outwards, through such concepts as the speech act, towards language in society, so the essentially social interpretation of language as behaviour can be used to direct attention on to the individual, placing him in the human environment, as we expressed it earlier, and explaining his linguistic potential, as speaker-hearer and writer-reader, in these terms. This does not presuppose, or preclude, any particular theory about the nature of the mental processes that are involved in his mastery of language, either in how he speaks and understands or in how he learnt to do so in the first place. There are conflicting

psychological theories on these questions, as we shall see in the next section; but our present perspective is neutral in their regard.

The ability to speak and understand, and the development of this ability in the child, are essential ingredients in the life of social man. To approach these from the outside, as interorganism phenomena, is to take a functional view of language. The social aspect of language becomes the reference point for the biological aspect, rather than the other way round. In the next two sections we shall consider briefly what this means.

III A functional approach to language and language development

In the last part of this paper we shall suggest a number of specific topics which might be explored, both inside and outside the school, as a way of finding out for oneself more about the nature of language and its place in the life of social man. These are related to the general perspective outlined in section II, that of the individual as seen through the lens of his membership of 'society'—that is, in the context of other individuals; with his language potential being understood as the medium by which the relationships into which he enters are established, developed and maintained. This means that we are taking a functional view of language, in the sense that we are interested in what language can do, or rather in what the speaker, child or adult, can do with it; and that we try to explain the nature of language, its internal organization and patterning, in terms of the functions that it has evolved to serve.

First of all, therefore, we should look briefly into the question of linguistic function, and say a little about it, both in regard to what language is and in regard to how it is learnt by a child. Let us take the latter point first, and consider a functional approach to the question of how the child learns his mother tongue. This process, the learning of the mother tongue, is often referred to as 'language acquisition'. This seems rather an unfortunate term because it suggests that language is some kind of a commodity to be acquired, and, although the metaphor is innocent enough in itself, if it is taken too literally the consequences can be rather harmful. The use of this metaphor has led to the belief in what is known as a 'deficit theory' of language learning, as a means of explaining how children come to fail in school: the suggestion that certain children, perhaps because of their social background, have not acquired enough of this commodity called language, and in order to help them we must send relief supplies. The implication is that there is a gap to be filled, and from this derive various compensatory practices that may be largely irrelevant to the children's needs. Now this is a false and misleading view of language and of educational failure; and while one should not make too much of one item of terminology, we prefer to avoid the term 'language acquisition' and return to the earlier and entirely appropriate designation of 'language development'.

In the psychological, or psycholinguistic, sphere, there are two main types of approach to the question of language development.

These have been referred to as the 'nativist' and the 'environmentalist' positions. Everyone agrees, of course, that human beings are biologically endowed with the ability to learn language, and that this is a uniquely human attribute—no other species has it, however much a chimpanzee or a dolphin may be trained to operate with words or symbols. But the nativist view holds that there is a specific language-learning faculty, distinct from other learning faculties, and that this provides the human infant with a readymade and rather detailed blueprint of the structure of language. Learning one's mother tongue consists in fitting the patterns of whatever language he hears around him into the framework which he already possesses. The environmentalist view considers that language learning is not fundamentally distinct from other kinds of learning; it depends on those same mental faculties that are involved in all aspects of the child's learning processes. Rather than having built in to his genetic makeup a set of concrete universals of language, in this view what the child has is the ability to process certain highly abstract types of cognitive relation which underlie (among other things) the linguistic system; the very specific properties of language are not innate, and therefore the child is more dependent on his environment—on the language he hears around him, together with the contexts in which it is uttered—for the successful learning of his mother tongue. In a sense, therefore, the difference of views is a recurrence of the old controversy of nature and nurture, or heredity and environment, in a new guise.

Each of these views can be criticized, although the criticisms that are actually made often relate to particular models of the learning process that have no necessary connection with a nativist or environmentalist position. For example, it is sometimes assumed that an environmentalist interpretation implies some form of behaviourist theory, an essentially stimulus-response, associationist view of learning; but this is totally untrue. Equally, the nativist view is by no means dependent on the notion that learning proceeds by fitting items into the marked slots which nature provided and running the machine to test whether the match is appropriate. The differences between nativist and environmentalist are differences of emphasis, among other things in their ideas concerning the essential character of language, where they stem from two rather different traditions. Broadly speaking, the nativist model reflects the philosophical-logical strand in the history of thinking about language, with its sharp distinction between the ideal and the real (which Chomsky calls 'competence' and 'performance') and its view of language as 'rules'—essentially rules of syntax. The environmentalist represents the ethnographic tradition, which rejects the distinction of ideal and real, defines what is grammatical as, by and large, what is acceptable, and sees language as relations based

on meaning, with meaning defined in terms of function. To this extent the two interpretations are complementary rather than contradictory; but they have tended to become associated with conflicting psychological theories and thus to be strongly counterposed one against the other.

One argument often put forward in support of a nativist approach must be dismissed as fallacious; this is the theory of the unstructured input, according to which the child cannot be dependent on what he hears around him because what he hears is no more than bits and pieces—unfinished or ungrammatical sentences, full of hesitations, backtracking, unrelated fragments and the like. This idea seems to have arisen because the earliest tape recordings of connected discourse that linguists analysed were usually recordings of intellectual conversations, which do tend to be very scrappy, since the speakers are having to plan as they go along and the premises are constantly shifting, and which are also largely insulated from the immediate situation, so that there are no contextual clues. But it is not in fact true of the ordinary everyday speech that typically surrounds the small child, which is fluent, highly structured, and closely related to the non-verbal context of situation. Moreover it tends to have very few deviations in it; I found myself when observing the language spoken to, and in the presence of, a small child that almost all the sequences were well formed and whole, acceptable even to the sternest grammatical lawgiver. Of course the fact that the notion of unstructured input is unsound does not disprove the nativist theory; it merely removes one of the arguments that has been used to support it.

More important than the grammatical shape of what the child hears, however, is the fact that it is functionally related to observable features of the situation around him. This consideration allows us to give another account of language development that is not dependent on any particular psycholinguistic theory, an account that is functional and sociological rather than structural and psychological. The two are not in competition; they are about different things. A functional theory is not a theory about the mental processes involved in the learning of the mother tongue; it is a theory about the social processes involved. As we expressed it in the first section, it is concerned with language between people (interorganism), and therefore learning to speak is interpreted as the individual's mastery of a behaviour potential. In this perspective, language is a form of interaction, and it is learnt through interaction; this, essentially, is what makes it possible for a culture to be transmitted from one generation to the next.

In a functional approach to language development the first question to be asked is, 'what are the functions that language serves in the life of an infant?' This might seem self-

contradictory, if an infant is one who does not yet speak; but the paradox is intentional—before he has mastered any recognizable form of his mother tongue the child already has a linguistic system, in the sense that he can express certain meanings through the consistent use of vocal sounds. There are, perhaps, four main reasons for putting the question in this form.

1. We can ask the same question at any stage in the life of the individual, up to and including adulthood; there have in fact been a number of functional theories of adult and adolescent language.
2. It is much easier to answer the question in respect of a very young child; the earlier one starts, the more clearcut the functions are (whereas with an approach based on structure, the opposite is the case; it is in general *harder* to analyse the structure of children's speech than that of adults).
3. We can reasonably assume that the child is functionally motivated; if language is for the child a means of attaining social ends—that is, ends which are important to him as a social being—we need look no further than this for the reasons why he learns it.
4. A functional approach to language, if it includes a developmental perspective, can throw a great deal of light on the nature of language itself. Language is as it is because of what it has to do.

To these we might add a fifth, though this is not so much a reason for asking the question as an incidental bonus for having done so. One of the problems in studying the language of a very young child is that of knowing what is language and what is not. We can answer that, in a functional context, by saying that any vocal sound (and any gesture, if the definition is made to include gesture) which is interpretable by reference to a recognized function of language is language—provided always that the relationship of sound to meaning is regular and consistent. The production of a sound for the purpose of practising that sound is a means of *learning* language, but is not itself an instance of language. The production of a sound for the purpose of attracting attention *is* language, once we have reason to assert that 'attracting attention' is a meaning that fits in with the functional potential of language at this stage of development.

Looking at the early stages of language development from a functional viewpoint, we can follow the process whereby the child gradually 'learns how to mean'—for this is what first-language learning is. If there is anything which the child can be said to be acquiring, it is a range of potential, which we could refer to as his 'meaning potential'. This consists in the mastery of a small number of elementary functions of language, and of a range of choices in meaning within each one. The choices are very few at first, but they expand rapidly as the functional potential of the system is reinforced by success: the sounds that the child

makes do in fact achieve the desired results, at least on a significant number of occasions, and this provides the impetus for taking the process further. As an example, Nigel, whose language I studied in successive six-weekly stages from the age of nine months onwards, started apparently with just two functions and one or two meanings in each. At 10½ months, when he first had a recognizable linguistic system, he could express a total of twelve different meanings; these were derived from four clearly identifiable functions (the first four in the list below) and included, among others, what we might translate as 'do that right now!', 'I want my toy bird down' and 'nice to see you; shall we look at this picture together?' By 16½ months, when he was on the threshold of the second phase of language development, the move into English (or whatever language is going to be the mother tongue), he had six functions and a total of fifty meanings that he could, and regularly did, express.

In studying Nigel's progress I used as the framework a set of functions which I had worked out—before he was born—in the course of discussion with my colleagues in the Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching. Teachers taking part in the trials of the materials which were being produced by the Programme had often felt the need for more information about how children learn language, with the emphasis on use rather than on structure; and the Home Office Children's Department Development Group, on behalf of those of the teachers who were from approved schools (as they were then), had called a conference on 'Language, Life and Learning', at which I put forward an outline of what language means to the preschool child, as understood in terms of what he is able to do with it. This involved a set of seven initial functions, as follows:

1. Instrumental ('I want'): satisfying material needs
2. Regulatory ('do as I tell you'): controlling the behaviour of others
3. Interactional ('me and you'): getting along with other people
4. Personal ('here I come'): identifying and expressing the self
5. Heuristic ('tell me why'): exploring the world around (and inside one)
6. Imaginative ('let's pretend'): creating a world of one's own
7. Informative ('I've got something to tell you'): communicating new information.

These headings served as a useful basis for following the developmental progress of an infant, whose early vocal sounds, although still prelinguistic in the sense that they were not modelled on the English language, were used effectively for just these purposes—to obtain goods or services that he required (instrumental), to influence the behaviour of those closest to him (regulatory), to maintain his emotional ties with them (inter-

actional), and so on. The meanings that he can express at this stage—the number of different things that he can ask for, for example—are naturally very restricted; but he has internalized the fact that language serves these purposes, and it is significant that for each of them he has one generalized expression, meaning simply ‘I want that’ or ‘do that!’ etc., where the interpretation is given by the situation (e.g. ‘I want that spoon’ or ‘go on singing’), as well as a number of specific expressions, very few at first but soon growing, and soon becoming independent of the presence of the object or other visible sign of his intent.

So by adopting a functional standpoint we can go back to the beginning of the child’s language development, reaching beyond the point where he has started to master structures, beyond even his first words, if by ‘words’ we mean items derived from the adult language; and taking as the foundations of language those early utterances which are not yet English or French or Swahili or Urdu but which every parent recognizes as being meaningful, quite distinct from crying and sneezing and the other non-linguistic noises the child makes. At this stage, the child’s utterances cannot readily be ‘translated’ into the adult language. Just as we cannot adequately represent the sounds he makes by spelling them, either in the orthography of the mother tongue or even in phonetic script, because the system which these symbols impose is too detailed and specific, so also we cannot adequately represent the meanings the child expresses in terms of adult grammar and vocabulary. The child’s experience differs so widely from that of the adult that there is only a very partial correspondence between his meanings and those that the adult is predisposed to recognize. But if his utterances are interpreted in the light of particular functions, which are recognizable to the adult as plausible ways of using language, it becomes possible to bridge the gap between them—and in this way to show how the infant’s linguistic system ultimately evolves and develops into that of the adult, which is otherwise the most puzzling aspect of the language development process. By the time he reached the age of 18 months, Nigel could use language effectively in the instrumental, regulatory, interactional and personal functions, and was beginning to use it for pretend-play (the ‘imaginative’ function), and also heuristically, for the purpose of exploring the environment. Now for the first time he launched into English, making rapid strides in vocabulary and grammar; and it was very clear from a study of his speech that his principal motive for doing so was the use of language as a learning device.

In order for language to be a means of learning, it is essential for the child to be able to encode in language, through words and structures, his experience of processes of the external world and of the people and things that participate in them.

IV Language and social structure

In section III, we considered the process of learning the mother tongue from a functional point of view, interpreting it as the progressive mastery of a number of basic functions of language and the building up of a 'meaning potential' in respect of each. Here we are adopting a sociolinguistic perspective on language—or rather a perspective which in terms of the earlier discussion would be inter-organism. Language is being regarded as the encoding of a 'behaviour potential into a 'meaning potential'; that is, as a means of expressing what the human organism 'can do', in interaction with other human organisms, by turning it into what he 'can mean'. What he can mean (the semantic system) is, in turn, encoded into what he 'can say' (the lexicogrammatical system, or grammar and vocabulary); to use our own folk-linguistic terminology, meanings are expressed in wordings. Wordings are, finally, recoded into sounds (it would be nice if we could say 'soundings', but this usage, although not impossible, is rare), or spellings (the phonological and orthographic systems).*

This perspective is valuable to the linguist because it affords an insight into *why* language is as it is. There is no *a priori* reason why human language should have taken just the evolutionary path that it has taken and no other; our brains could have produced a symbolic system of quite a different kind. But if we consider what language is required to do for us, there are certain functions which it must fulfil in all human cultures, regardless of differences in the physical and material environment. These are functions of a very general kind.

(1) Language has to interpret the whole of our experience, reducing the indefinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, and also of the world inside us, the processes of our own consciousness, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena: types of processes, events and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions, and the like.

(2) Language has to express certain elementary logical

*Terms like *meaning*, *wording* and *spelling* are so familiar in everyday speech that we are hardly aware of them as ways of talking about language. But when we say, to a pupil, or to a committee chairman perhaps, 'I think you'll have to alter the wording', we are bringing into play what Peter Doughty calls 'a "folk linguistic", a "common sense" about the language we live by' (*Exploring Language*, p. 6).

relations, like 'and' and 'or' and 'if', as well as those created by language itself such as 'namely', 'says' and 'means'.

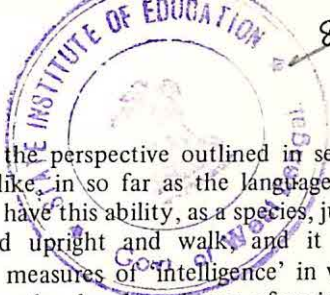
(3) Language has to express our participation, as speakers, in the speech situation; the roles we take on ourselves and impose on others; our wishes, feelings, attitudes and judgements.

(4) Language has to do all these things simultaneously, in a way which relates what is being said to the context in which it is being said, both to what has been said before and to the 'context of situation'; in other words, it has to be capable of being organized as relevant discourse, not just as words and sentences in a grammar-book or dictionary.

It is the demands posed by the service of these functions which have moulded the shape of language and fixed the course of its evolution. These functions are built in to the semantic system of language, and they form the basis of the grammatical organization, since the task of grammar is to encode the meanings deriving from these various functions into articulated structures. Not only are these functions served by all languages, at least in their adult form; they have also determined the way human language has evolved.

So when we study the language development of young children, we are really investigating two questions at once. The first concerns the language they invent for themselves, on the basis of the set of elementary uses or functions of language which reflect the developmental needs, potentialities and achievements of the infant—instrumental, regulatory and so on. The second concerns their transition to the adult language, a language which is still functional in its origins but where the concept of 'function' has undergone a significant change: it is no longer simply synonymous with 'use', but has become much more abstract, a kind of 'metafunction' through which all the innumerable concrete uses of language which the adult engages in are given symbolic expression in a systematic and finite form. To what extent the individual child traces the evolutionary path in moving from one to the other is immaterial; it appears that at a certain point he abandons it, and takes a leap directly into the adult system. Be that as it may, he has to make the transition, and in doing so he carves out for himself a route that reflects the particular circumstances of his own individual history and experience. Geoffrey Thornton expresses this very well when he says that the language which each child learns 'is a unique inheritance. It is an inheritance because he is endowed, as a human being, with the capacity to learn language merely by growing up in an environment in which language is being used around him. It is unique, because... no two people occupy identical places in an environment where language learning is taking place, and this must mean that the language learnt is unique to the individual' (*Exploring Language*, p. 48).

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This takes us back to the perspective outlined in section II. Biologically, we are all alike, in so far as the language-learning capacity is concerned; we have this ability, as a species, just as we have the ability to stand upright and walk, and it is quite independent of the usual measures of 'intelligence' in whatever form. Ecologically, on the other hand, each one of us is unique, since the environmental pattern is never exactly repeated, and one individual's experience is never the same as another's.

However, the uniqueness of the individual, in terms of his personal experience, must be qualified by reference to the culture. Our environment is shaped by the culture, and the conditions under which we learn language are largely culturally determined. This point is significant at two levels, one of which is very obvious, the other less so. It is obviously true in the sense that a child learns the language he hears around him; if he is growing up in an English-speaking society, he learns English. This is a matter of the *linguistic* environment, which is itself part of the culture, but in a special sense. Moreover he learns that dialectal variety of English which belongs to his particular socioregional subculture: working-class London, urban middle-class Northern, rural Dorset and so on. (He may of course learn more than one dialect, or more than one language, if the culture is a pluralistic one, or under other special conditions.) It is equally true, but much less obvious, in another sense: namely that the culture shapes our behaviour patterns, and a great deal of our behaviour is mediated through language. The child learns his mother tongue in the context of behavioural settings where the norms of the culture are acted out and enunciated for him, settings of parental control, instruction, personal interaction and the like; and, reciprocally, he is 'socialized' into the value systems and behaviour patterns of the culture through the use of language at the same time as he is learning it.

We can now see the relevance of this to linguistic theories of educational failure, which were referred to briefly in the last section. There has been much discussion of educability lately, and various theories have been put forward. One school of thought has concentrated on the effect of the child's *linguistic* environment—namely, the particular form of language he has grown up to speak. In practice, since educational failure is largely a symptom found in the urban lower working class, this means the particular socioregional dialect; and we find two versions of the 'language failure' theory here, sometimes known as the 'deficit theory' and the 'difference theory'. According to the deficit theory, the child's language is simply defective; it lacks some essential elements—it is deficient, perhaps, in sounds, or words, or structures. Now this is not merely nonsense; it is dangerous nonsense. Unfortunately it has rarely been explicitly denied; probably because, as the American educator Joan Baratz put it,



'linguists ... consider such a view of language so absurd as to make them feel that nobody could possibly believe it and therefore to refute it would be a great waste of time'. There is no such thing as a deficient social dialect. But, on the other hand, if a teacher believes that there is, and that some or all of his pupils speak one, then, as Frederick Williams has very convincingly shown in his investigations in American schools, he thereby predisposes the children to linguistic failure. This is known as the 'stereotype hypothesis': children, no less than adults, will come to behave like the stereotype to which they are consigned.*

This then leads us into the 'difference' version of the theory, according to which the problem is not that the child's speech is deficient but that it is different—different, in implication, from some received standard or norm. This would obviously be important if it meant that the child did not understand the language in which he was being taught (as happens with many immigrant children). But for the native English-speaking child, this is not the problem. Wherever he comes from, and whatever section of society he comes from, the speech differences are relatively slight and superficial, and in any case he has heard the teacher's language frequently on television and elsewhere, so that he never has more than very temporary difficulty in understanding it, and in fact is usually rather competent at imitating it—an activity, however, which he tends to consider more appropriate to the playground than to the classroom. So the difference theory resolves itself into a question of prejudice: if the child fails as a result of differences between his language and that of the school, it is not because there are difficulties of understanding but because the child's variety of English carries a social stigma: it is regarded by society as inferior. If 'society' here includes the teacher, the child is, effectively, condemned to failure from the start.

To that extent, then, the difference theory, unlike the deficit theory, is at least partially true: there *are* prejudices against certain varieties of English, and they *are* shared by some teachers. But they are by no means shared by all teachers; and it is difficult to believe that this factor by itself could be sufficient explanation of the full extent of educational failure, especially since children have a great capacity for adaptation—if one form of behaviour does not pay off they will usually switch to another, and they are quite capable of doing so where language is concerned. Moreover the prejudices are getting less, whereas the general view is that educational failure is increasing.

We have then to try another angle, and this is where the functional perspective comes in. Fundamentally, educational failure is a social problem, not a linguistic one; but it has a

* For both these references see Frederick Williams, ed., *Language and Poverty*.

linguistic aspect, which we can begin to understand if we consider the cultural environment in the second of the two senses mentioned above. It is not the linguistic environment in the sense of which language or dialect the child learns to speak that matters, so much as the cultural or subcultural environment as this is embodied in and transmitted through the language. In other words, the 'language difference' may be significant, but if so it is a difference of function rather than of form.

It is this fundamental insight which lies behind Professor Bernstein's theoretical and empirical work in the field of language and society; together with a further insight, namely that what determines the actual cultural-linguistic configuration is, essentially, the social structure, the system of social relations, in the family and other key social groups, which is characteristic of the particular subculture. Bernstein (*Class, Codes and Control*, I, p. 122) writes: 'A number of fashions of speaking, frames of consistency, are possible in any given language and . . . these fashions of speaking, linguistic forms or codes, are themselves a function of the form social relations take. According to this view, the form of the social relation or, more generally, the social structure generates distinct linguistic forms or codes and *these codes essentially transmit the culture and so constrain behaviour*' (his italics). Since, in the words of the American sociologist and linguist William Stewart, 'so much of human behaviour is socially conditioned rather than genetically determined', it is not difficult to suppose an intimate connection between language on the one hand and modes of thought and behaviour on the other.*

* This view is associated first and foremost with the work of the great American linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, who wrote 'An accepted pattern of using words is often prior to certain lines of thinking and modes of behaviour'. Whorf emphasized that it is not so much in 'special uses of language' (technical terms, political discourse &c.) as 'in its constant ways of arranging data and its most ordinary everyday analysis of phenomena that we need to recognize the influence [language] has on other activities, cultural and personal' (*Language, Thought and Reality*, pp. 134-5). Bernstein points out that, in Whorf's thinking, 'the link between language, culture and habitual thought is *not* mediated through the social structure', whereas his own theory 'places the emphasis on changes in the social structure as major factors in shaping or changing a given culture through their effect on the consequences of fashions of speaking. It shares with Whorf the controlling influence on experience ascribed to "frames of consistency" involved in fashions of speaking. It differs from Whorf by asserting that, in the context of a common language in the sense of a general code, there will arise distinct linguistic forms, fashions of speaking, which induce in their speakers *different* ways of relating to objects and persons.'

Bernstein has investigated *how* this connection is made, and suggests that it is through linguistic codes, or fashions of speaking, which arise as a consequence of the social structure and the types of social relation associated with it. As Mary Douglas put it, 'The control [of thought] is not in the speech forms but in the set of human relations which generate thought and speech' ('Speech, class and Basil Bernstein' p. 312).

What are these linguistic codes, or fashions of speaking? They relate, essentially, to the functional account of language. It is not the words and the sentence structures—still less the pronunciation or 'accent'—which make the difference between one type of code and another; it is the relative emphasis placed on the different functions of language, or, to put it more accurately, the kinds of meaning that are typically associated with them. The 'fashions of speaking' are sociosemantic in nature; they are patterns of meaning that emerge, more or less strongly, in particular contexts, especially those relating to the socialization of the child in the family. Hence although each child's language-learning environment is unique, he also shares certain common features with other children of a similar social background; not merely in the superficial sense that the material environments may well be alike—in fact they may not—but in the deeper sense that the forms of social relation and the role systems surrounding him have their effect on the kind of choices in meaning which will be highlighted and given prominence in different types of situation. Peter Doughty comments 'the terms *elaborated* and *restricted* refer to characteristic ways of using language to interact with other human beings; they do not suggest that there are two kinds of "meaning potential"' (*Exploring Language*, pp. 104-5).

This dependence on social structure is not merely unavoidable, it is essential to the child's development; he can develop only as *social* man, and therefore his experience must be shaped in ways which make him a member of society and his particular section of it. It becomes restrictive only where the social structure orients the child's thinking *away from* the modes of experience that the school requires. To quote Bernstein again, 'the different focusing of experience . . . creates a major problem of educability only where the school produces discontinuity between its symbolic orders and those of the child' (*Class, Codes and Control I*, pp. 183-4). In other words, the processes of becoming educated require that the child's meaning potential should have developed along certain lines in certain types of context, especially in relation to the exploration of the environment and of his own part in it. To what extent this requirement is inherent in the very concept of education, and to what extent it is merely a feature of education as it is at present organized in Britain and other highly urbanized societies, we do not know; but as things are, certain ways of organizing experience through language, and of partici-

pating and interacting with people and things, are necessary to success in school. The child who is not predisposed to this type of verbal exploration in this type of experiential and interpersonal context 'is not at home in the educational world', as Bernstein puts it. Whether a child is so predisposed or not turns out not to be any innate property of the child as an individual, an inherent limitation on his mental powers, as used to be generally thought; it is merely the result of a mismatch between his own symbolic orders of meaning and those of the school, a mismatch that results from the different patterns of socialization that characterize different sections of society, or subcultures, and which are in turn a function of the underlying social relations in the family and elsewhere. Mary Douglas says of Bernstein that he asks 'what structuring in society itself calls for its own appropriate structures of speech' (p. 5); and she goes on to add 'A common speech form transmits much more than words; it transmits a hidden baggage of shared assumptions', a 'collective consciousness that constitutes the social bond'.

It is all too easy to be aware of subcultural differences in speech forms, because we are all sensitive to differences of dialect and accent. Unfortunately this is precisely where we go wrong, because differences of dialect and accent are in themselves irrelevant; in Bernstein's words, 'There is nothing, but nothing, in the dialect as such, which prevents a child from internalizing and learning to use universalistic meanings', and dialect is a problem only if it is *made* a problem artificially by the prejudice and ignorance of others. It is much harder to become aware of the *significant* differences, which are masked by dialectal variation (and by no means always correspond to dialect distinctions), and which do not appear in any obvious form, as differences in vocabulary or grammatical structure. We are still far from being able to give a comprehensive or systematic account of the linguistic realizations of Bernstein's codes or of the ways in which language operates in the transmission of culture. But the perspective is that of language and social man, and the functional investigation of language and language development provides the basis for understanding.

In essence, what seems to happen is this. The child first constructs a language in the form of a range of meanings that relate directly to certain of his basic needs. As time goes on, the meanings become more complex, and he replaces this by a symbolic system—a semantic system with structural realizations—that is based on the language he hears around him; this is what we call his 'mother tongue'. Since this is learnt, and has in fact evolved, in the service of the same basic functions, it is, essentially, a functional system; but its functionality is now built in at a very abstract level. This is what was referred to at the beginning of this section, when we said that the adult linguistic

system has, in effect, the four generalized functional components, or 'metafunctions', experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual. These form the basis for the organization of meaning when the child moves from his original protolanguage into language proper.

But he does not abandon the original concrete functional elements of the system as he invented it. These still define the purposes for which language is used; and out of them evolve the social contexts and situation types that make up the patterns of use of language in daily life—including those contexts that Bernstein has shown to be critical in the socialization process. Herein lies the basis of the significant subcultural variation that we have been looking at. In *which* particular contexts of use will the child bring to bear *which* portions of the functional resources of the system? Seen from a linguistic point of view, the different 'codes', as Bernstein calls them, are different strategies of language use. All human beings put language to certain types of use, and all of them learn a linguistic system which has evolved in that context; but what aspects of the system are typically deployed and emphasized in one type of use or another is to a significant extent determined by the culture—by the systems of social relations in which the child grows up, including the roles he himself learns to recognize and to adopt. All children have access to the meaning potential of the system; but they may differ, because social groups differ, in their interpretation of what the situation demands.

V. Language and situation

Children grow up, and their language grows up with them. By the age of two and a half or even earlier the child has mastered the adult language *system*; the framework is all there. He will spend the rest of his childhood—the rest of his life, even—mastering the adult *language*.

Language, as we have stressed, is a potential: it is what the speaker can do. What a person can do in the linguistic sense, that is, what he can do as speaker/hearer, is equivalent to what he 'can mean'; hence the description of language as a 'meaning potential'.

To describe language as a potential does not mean we are not interested in the actual, in what the speaker does. But in order to make sense of what he does, we have to know what he can do. This is true whatever our particular angle on language, whether we are looking at it as behaviour, or as knowledge (Chomsky's 'competence'), or as art: what is, the actual sentences and words that constitute our direct experience of language, derives its significance from what could be. But it is in the social perspective that we are best able to explain what *is*, because we can pay attention to situations of language use, taking account of the non-linguistic factors which serve as the controlling environment. It is at least theoretically possible to look at the 'actual' from a psycholinguistic viewpoint (so-called 'theories of performance'), but it has not yet been shown to be very fruitful.

When we come to examine the adult language in its contexts of use, we at once run up against the difficulty that the one thing we cannot specify is what the 'use' of any given utterance is. Nor can we enumerate the total set of possible uses for language as a whole. We cannot draw up a general list setting out the adult's uses of language, in the way that we were able to do for the developmental functions in the language of the very small child. Or rather—what amounts to the same thing—we could draw up a hundred and one such lists, and there would be no means of preferring one list over another. Then when we came to consider actual instances we should have to recognize that in any particular utterance the speaker was in fact using language in a number of different ways, for a variety of different purposes, all at the same time. The use of language is not a simple concept.

Nevertheless it is a very helpful one, without which we cannot explain either the variation we find within a language—the different styles, levels of formality and so on—or the nature of

language itself. The latter is outside our scope here, although we referred in the preceding section to the inherently functional organization of the linguistic system.*

But the former is fundamental to any consideration of language in an educational context. The ability to control the varieties of one's language that are appropriate to different uses is one of the cornerstones of linguistic success, not least for the school pupil. (For an excellent discussion of 'differences according to use' see *Exploring Language*, Ch. 11 'Diversity in written English' by John Pearce.)

The basic concept here is that of 'context of situation', originally suggested by Malinowski and subsequently elaborated by Firth (see J. R. Firth, 'Personality and language in society', in *Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951*, Oxford University Press, 1959). Essentially what this implies is that language comes to life only when functioning in some environment. We do not experience language in isolation—if we did we would not recognize it as language—but always in relation to a scenario, some background of persons and actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning. This is referred to as the 'situation', so language is said to function in 'contexts of situation' and any account of language which fails to build in the situation as an essential ingredient is likely to be artificial and unrewarding.

It is important to qualify the notion of 'situation' by adding the word 'relevant'. The 'context of situation' does not refer to all the bits and pieces of the material environment such as might appear if we had an audio and video recording of a speech event with all the sights and sounds surrounding the utterances. It refers to those features which are relevant to the speech that is taking place. Such features may be very concrete and immediate, as they tend to be with young children whose remarks often bear a direct pragmatic relation to the environment, e.g. *some more!* 'I want some more of what I've just been eating'. But they may be quite abstract and remote, as in a technical discussion among experts, where the 'situation' would include such things as the particular problem they were trying to solve and their own training and experience, while the immediate surroundings of objects and events would probably contain nothing of relevance at all. Even where the speech does relate to the immediate environment, it is likely that only certain features of it will be the relevant ones; for example, is it the presence of a particular individual that matters, or is it a certain role relationship, no matter who is occupying the roles in question? If John says *I love you*, it presumably does matter that it was said to Mary and not Jane; but if he says *Can you put up a prescription for me?*, what is relevant in that

*See further M. A. K. Halliday, *Explorations in the Functions of Language* London, Edward Arnold, 1973.

situation is the *role* of dispensing chemist, and not the identity of the individual who happens to be occupying it at that particular time and place.

In general, the ability to use language in abstract and indirect contexts of situation is what distinguishes the speech of adults from that of children. Learning language consists in part in learning to free it from the constraints of the immediate environment. This process *begins* very early in life, when the child first learns to ask for things that are not visible and to recall objects and events which he has observed earlier. But it is a gradual process, which takes place in different ways with different children; this is one of the variables which Bernstein has found to be significant—which *types* of situation serve as the gateway to more abstract and generalized contextual meanings. As he says, 'certain groups of children, through the forms of their socialization, are oriented towards receiving and offering universalistic meanings in *certain contexts*'. This in itself is not important; but it becomes important if there are certain *types* of situation which play a central part in the child's total development, since these are the ones where he will need to use language in ways that are least dependent on the here and now.

This leads us to the notion of a situation type. Looking at how people actually use language in daily life, we find that the apparently infinite number of different possible situations represents in reality a very much smaller number of general *types* of situation, which we can describe in such terms as 'players instructing novice in a game', 'mother reading bedtime story to child', 'customer ordering goods over the telephone', 'teacher guiding pupils' discussion of a poem' and the like. Not all these situation types are equally interesting, and some are obviously very trivial; but in the last resort the importance of any abstract category of this kind depends on what we are going to make of it, and the significance of the notion of 'context of situation' for the present discussion is that some situation types play a crucial role in the child's move into the adult language. For example, if a mother or father is playing with a child with some constructional toy, such as a set of building bricks, this type of situation is likely to contain some remarks of guidance and explanation, with utterances like *I don't think that one will go on there; it's too wide*. The context of situation for this utterance is one in which the child is gaining instruction relating to his handling of objects, and although any one instance is not by itself going to make much difference, an accumulation of experiences of this kind may be highly significant. And if it regularly happens that the remarks relate not just to *this particular* tower that is being built with *these particular* bricks, but to tower-building in general—in other words, if the context of situation is not limited to the actual physical surroundings, but extends to more general and less

immediate environments, as would be implied by a remark such as *the smaller ones have to go at the top*—then language is now serving a primary function in this aspect of the child's development. Hence he will have a strong sense of *this* use of language, of language as a means of learning about the physical environment and about his own ability to interact with it and control it.

The types of situation which seem to be most critical to the child's socialization, which have been identified by Bernstein in the most general terms*, are already anticipated in the developmental functions through which the child has first started to build up a linguistic system of his own: the instrumental, regulatory and so on, described in section III above. For example, those types of situation which involve explanation and instruction, Bernstein's 'instructional context', typically pick up the developmental thread that first appeared in the form of a "heuristic" function, the child's early use of language to explore his environment. They are therefore critical also in the child's learning of *language*, since it is through using language in situations of these types that he builds on and expands his meaning potential.

This is where the notions of context of situation, and situation type, become important for the school. The school requires that the child should be able to use language in certain ways: first of all, most obviously, that he should be able to use language to learn. The teacher operates in contexts of situation where it simply has to be taken for granted that for every child, by the time he arrives in school, language is a means of learning; and this is an assumption that is basic to the educational process. Less obvious, but perhaps no less fundamental, is the assumption that language is a means of personal expression and participation: that the child is at home, linguistically, in interpersonal contexts, where his early use of language to interact with those who were emotionally important to him, and to express and develop his own uniqueness as an individual (the interactional and personal functions), has in the same way been taken up and extended into new realms of meaning. No doubt both these assumptions are

*Bernstein refers to them as 'critical contexts' for socialization, using 'context' in the sense of a generalized situation type. He identifies the 'regulative' context, 'where the child is made aware of the rules of the moral order, and their various backings'; the 'instructional' context, 'where the child learns about the objective nature of objects and persons, and acquires skills of various kinds'; the 'imaginative or innovating' contexts, 'where the child is encouraged to experiment and re-create his world on his own terms'; and the 'interpersonal' context, 'where the child is made aware of affective states—his own, and others' (*Class, Codes and Control I*, pp. 181, 198).

true, as they stand: every normal child has mastered the use of language both for entering into personal relationships and for exploring his environment. But the *kinds* of meaning which he associates with the contexts of situation where these uses of language are prominent may vary considerably from one child to another. Here we are back to Bernstein's codes again, which we have now approached from another angle, seeing them as differences in the meaning potential which may be typically associated with given situation types. As we have seen, these differences have their origin in the social structure. In Ruqaiya Hasan's words, 'the "code" is defined by reference to its semantic properties' and 'the semantic properties of the codes can be predicted from the elements of social structure which, in fact, give rise to them' (Code, register and social dialect', p. 258).

Now the very young child, in his first ventures with language, keeps the functions of language fairly clearly apart; when he speaks, he is doing only one thing at a time—asking for some object, responding to a greeting, expressing interest or whatever it is. When he starts learning his mother tongue, however, the contexts of situation in which he uses it are already complex and many-sided, with a number of threads of meaning running simultaneously. To vary the metaphor, we could say that all speech other than the protolanguage of infancy is polyphonic: different melodies are kept going side by side, and each element in the sentence is like a chord which contributes something to all of them. This is perhaps the most striking characteristic of human language, and one which distinguishes it from all other symbolic communication systems.

VI Register

This last point is a reflection of the contexts of situation in which language is used, and the ways in which one type of situation may differ from another. Types of linguistic situation differ from one another, broadly speaking, in three respects: first, as regards what is actually taking place; secondly, as regards what part the language is playing; and thirdly, as regards who is taking part. These three variables, taken together, determine the range within which meanings are selected and the forms which are used for their expression. In other words, they determine the 'register'.

The notion of register is at once very simple and very powerful.* It refers to the fact that the language we speak or write varies according to the type of situation. This in itself is no more than stating the obvious. What the theory of register does is to attempt to uncover the general principles which govern this variation, so that we can begin to understand *what* situational factors determine *what* linguistic features. It is a fundamental property of all languages that they display variation according to use; but surprisingly little is yet known about the nature of the variation involved, largely because of the difficulty of identifying the controlling factors.

An excellent example of register variation (and of how to investigate and describe it) is provided by Jean Ure in a paper entitled 'Lexical density and register differentiation'. Here Jean Ure shows that, at least in English, the lexical density of a text, which means the proportion of lexical items (content words) to words as a whole, is a function first of the medium (that is, whether it is spoken or written—written language has a higher lexical density than speech) and, within that, of the social function (pragmatic language, or 'language in action', has the lowest lexical density of all). This is probably true of all languages; but whether it is or not, it is a basic fact about English and a very good illustration of the relation between the actual and the potential that we referred to at the beginning of this section. We could say, following Dell Hymes, that it is part of the speaker's 'communicative competence' that he knows how to

*Useful discussions of the concept of register, in the present context, will be found in Hasan (1973) 'Code register and social dialect' and in Ure and Ellis (forthcoming) 'Register in descriptive linguistics and linguistic sociology'.

distribute lexical items in a text according to different kinds of language use; but there is really no need to introduce here the artificial concept of 'competence', or 'what the speaker knows', which merely adds an extra level of psychological interpretation to what can be explained more simply in direct sociolinguistic or functional terms.

It is easy to be misled here by posing the question the wrong way, as a number of writers on the subject of register have done. They have asked, in effect, 'what features of language are determined by register?', and then come up with instances of near-synonymy where one word differs from another in level of formality, rhetoric or technicality, like *chips* and *French fried potatoes*, or *deciduous dentition* and *milk teeth*. But these are commonplaces which lie at the fringe of register variation, and which in themselves would hardly need any linguistic or other kind of 'theory' to explain them. Asked in this way, the question can lead only to trivial answers; but it is the wrong question to ask. *All* language functions in contexts of situation, and is relatable to those contexts. The question is not what peculiarities of vocabulary, or grammar or pronunciation, can be directly accounted for by reference to the situation. It is *which* kinds of situational factor determine *which* kinds of selection in the linguistic system. The notion of register is thus a form of prediction: given that we know the situation, the social context of language use, we can predict a great deal about the language that will occur, with reasonable probability of being right. The important theoretical question then is: what do we need to know about the social context in order to make such predictions?

Let us make this more concrete. If I am talking about gardening, I may be more likely to use words that are the names of plants and other words referring to processes of cultivation; and this is one aspect of the relation of language to situation—the subject matter of gardening is part of the social context. But, in fact, the probability of such terms occurring in the discourse is also dependent on what I and my interlocutor are doing at the time. If we are actually engaged in gardening while we are talking, there may be very few words of this kind. Jean Ure quotes an amusing example from some Russian research on register: 'The recording was of people frying potatoes, and frying potatoes was what they were talking about; but since, it seems, neither frying nor potatoes were represented lexically in the text, the recording was a mystification to all who had not been in the kitchen at the time.' The image of language as merely the direct reflection of subject matter is simplistic and unsound, as Malinowski pointed out exactly fifty years ago; there is much more to it than that, and this is what the notion of register is all about.

What we need to know about a context of situation in order to predict the linguistic features that are likely to be associated with

it has been summarized under three headings: we need to know the 'field of discourse', the 'mode of discourse' and the 'tenor of discourse'.* We shall say a little more about these in section VII; here it will be helpful to quote John Pearce's summary, from *Exploring Language*, Chapter 11:

Field refers to the institutional setting in which a piece of language occurs, and embraces not only the subject-matter in hand but the whole activity of the speaker or participant in a setting [we might add: 'and of the other participants'] . . .

Mode refers to the channel of communication adopted: not only the choice between spoken and written medium, but much more detailed choices [we might add: 'and other choices relating to the role of language in the situation'] . . .

Tenor or Style refers to the relationship between participants . . . not merely variation in formality . . . but . . . such questions as the permanence or otherwise of the relationship and the degree of emotional charge in it.

These are the general concepts needed for describing what is linguistically significant in the context of situation. They include the subject matter, as an aspect of the 'field of discourse'—of the whole setting of relevant actions and events within which the language is functioning; for this is where subject matter belongs. We do not, in fact, first decide what we want to say, independently of the setting, and then dress it up in a garb that is appropriate to it in the context, as many writers on language and speech events seem to assume. The 'content' is part of the total planning that takes place. There is no clear line between the 'what' and the 'how'; all language is language-in-use, in a context of situation, and all of it relates to the situation, in the abstract sense in which we are using the term here.

We should here make a passing reference to dialects, which are part of the picture of language and social man, although not primarily relevant in the educational context except as the focus of linguistic attitudes. Our language is also determined by who we

*See Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964), *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching*, where the term 'style of discourse' was used instead of 'tenor'. Here we shall prefer the term 'tenor' introduced by Spencer and Gregory, in Nils Erik Enkvist, John Spencer and Michael Gregory (1964), *Linguistics and Style*, London, Oxford University Press (Language and Language Learning 6). A number of other, more or less related, schemata have been proposed; see especially Jeffrey Ellis, 'On contextual meaning', in C. E. Bazell *et al.*, eds., (1966), *In Memory of J. R. Firth*, London, Longman (Longman's Linguistics Library), and 'Linguistic sociology and institutional linguistics', *Linguistics* Vol. 19, 1965.

are; that is the basis of dialect, and in principle a dialect is with us all our lives—it is not subject to choice. In practice, however, this is less and less true, and the phenomenon of ‘dialect switching’ is widespread. Many speakers learn two or more dialects, either in succession, dropping the first when they learn the second, or in coordination, switching between them according to the context of situation. Hence the dialect comes to be an aspect of the register. If for example the standard dialect is used in formal contexts and the neighbourhood one in informal contexts, then one part of the contextual determination of linguistic features is the determination of choice of dialect. When dialects come to have different meanings for us, the choice of dialect becomes a choice of meaning, or a choice between different areas of our meaning potential.

Like the language of the child, the language of the adult is a set of socially contextualized resources of behaviour, a ‘meaning potential’ that is related to situations of use. Being ‘appropriate to the situation’ is not some optional extra in language; it is an essential element in the ability to mean. Of course, we are all aware of occasions when we feel about something said or written that it might have been expressed in a way that was more appropriate to the task in hand; we want to ‘keep the meaning but change the wording’. But these are the special cases, in which we are reacting to purely conventional features of register variation. In the last resort, it is impossible to draw a line between ‘what he said’ and ‘how he said it’, since this is based on a conception of language as existing in isolation from any context. The distinction between one register and another is a distinction of *what* is said as much as of *how* it is said, without any enforced separation between the two. If a seven-year-old insists on using slang when you think he should be using more formal language, this is a dispute about registers; but if he insists on talking about his football hero when you want him to talk about a picture he has been painting, then this is equally a dispute over registers, and one which is probably much more interesting and far-reaching for both teacher and pupil concerned.

Thus our functional picture of the adult linguistic system is of a culturally specific and situationally sensitive range of meaning potential. Language is the ability to ‘mean’ in the situation types, or social contexts, that are generated by the culture. When we talk about ‘uses of language’, we are concerned with the meaning potential that is associated with particular situation types; and we are likely to be especially interested in those which are of some social and cultural significance, in the light of a sociological theory of language such as Bernstein’s. This last point is perhaps worth stressing. The way that we have envisaged the study of language and social man, through the concept of ‘meaning potential’, might be referred to as a kind of ‘socio-semantics’, in

the sense that it is the study of meaning in a social or sociological framework. But there is a difference between 'social' and 'sociological' here. If we describe the context of situation in terms of *ad hoc* observations about the settings in which language is used, this could be said to be a 'social' account of language but hardly a 'sociological' one, since the concepts we are drawing on are not referred to any kind of general social theory. Such an account can be very illuminating, as demonstrated in a brilliant paper, published some twenty years ago, by T. F. Mitchell, called 'The language of buying and selling in Cyrenaica'—though since the language studied was Cyrenaican Arabic and the paper was published in a learned journal in Morocco, it is not widely known. But for research of this kind to be relevant to a teacher who is professionally concerned with his pupils' success in language, it has to relate to social contexts that are themselves of significance, in the sort of way that Bernstein's "critical contexts" are significant for the socialization of the child. The criteria would then be sociological rather than simply social—based on some theory of social structure and social change. In this respect, the earlier terms like Firth's 'sociological linguistics', or 'sociology of language' as used by Bernstein, are perhaps more pointed than the currently fashionable label 'sociolinguistics'.

VII Some topics to explore

In this final section we shall suggest some topics which offer the possibility of further exploration. These are topics which can be followed up in various ways: they can be explored through further reading, or in study groups; one can inquire into them by means of one's own investigations; and in many instances pupils in the class can be enlisted to help in the enquiry, for example by keeping a language diary, or by noting down things they hear said by a small brother or sister. The issues are ones which teachers have found to be relevant to their own work, and which can be 'researched' in the course of one's daily life, through observation and questioning, without the need for a year's leave of absence and a research foundation grant. The headings are:

1. Language development in young children
2. Language and socialization
3. Neighbourhood language profile
4. Language in the life of the individual
5. Language and situation
6. Language and institutions
7. Language attitudes.

1. Language development in young children

Anyone with a young child in the family can make himself a positive nuisance trying to record its speech, not only by cluttering up the house with concealed microphones and other equipment but also by accumulating vast quantities of unprocessed tape. (It takes ten hours to listen to ten hours of tape, and a great deal longer than that to transcribe it.) The most useful piece of research equipment is, actually a notebook and pencil; and the most important research qualification (as in many other areas) is the ability to *listen to language*, which is not difficult to acquire and yet is surprisingly seldom developed. This means the ability to attend to the actual words that are being spoken, as distinct from the usual kind of listening which involves the automatic decoding and processing of what is said. To put it another way, 'listening to language' means listening to the wording, or else the sounding (if the interest is in the phonetics),

instead of only to the meaning. Skulking behind the furniture and writing down what a small child says, and also what is said to and around him, with a brief note on what he is doing at the time (this is essential), is a useful source of insight, provided of course it is not carried to extremes. Pupils who have small brothers and sisters can do some valuable research here; the older ones can keep accurate records, while the younger ones, though they cannot be expected to do very much field work, will make up for this by virtue of the intrinsic interest of their own glosses and their interpretative comments.

What are we looking for? There are various kinds of understanding to be gained from listening to a child—not in the romantic sense, as a fount of intuitive wisdom (we shall never know whether he possesses such wisdom or not, because whatever he has disappears in the process of his learning to communicate it to us), but as a young human being struggling to grow up, linguistically as in other ways. We can see what are the functions for which he is building up a linguistic system, and how these functions relate to his survival and his social wellbeing. There is no need for an exact phonetic record—that is something to be left to the specialist—and no need to wait until we hear complete sentences or even recognizable words of English. The child of nine to eighteen months will have a range of vocal signals that are meaningful and understandable to those around him, such as Nigel's 'nanana' meaning 'give me that!'; in other words, he will have a range of *meanings*, which define what he can do in the various spheres of action to which vocal resources are applied (see the set of initial functions given in section III).

What the child does with language, at this early stage, is all the time shaping his own image of what language is. At a certain point, round about eighteen months old, he will abandon his laborious attempt to work through half a million years of human evolution creating his own language, and shortcircuit the process by 'going adult' and taking over the language he hears around him. The impetus for this move is still a functional one; the demands he makes on language are increasing, and his own 'do-it-yourself' system can no longer meet them. His language is now further strengthened and enriched as a resource for living and learning, by the addition of a whole new range of semantic choices; and his image of what language is, and what it can do, is enriched correspondingly. With this image he comes ready equipped to school; and the sad thing is that so few teachers in the past have either shared the image or even sought to understand what, in fact, the child can already do with language when he comes to them, which is a very great deal. To look into the functional origins of language, at the beginning of the developmental process, is to go a long way towards a sympathetic appreciation of what language means to the child when he first

sets foot in school. In the absence of such an appreciation, much of what goes on in the classroom may be largely irrelevant to his needs.

Points to look for:

(a) Very young children

What are the functions for which the very young child first begins to learn language?

What meanings does he learn to express, within these functions?

What sort of meanings can he *respond* to (e.g. 'Do you want . . .')?

Who does he (a) talk to (b) listen to? In what types of situation?

What kind of reinforcement does he get for his efforts? Who understands him most readily? Has he an interpreter (e.g. an older brother or sister)?

(b) Children nearer school age

What are the functions for which the child is now using language?

Is it possible, in fact, to recognize from among the mass of particular instances any general types of use that might be significant: learning about the material environment, learning about social relations and cultural values, controlling behaviour, responding emotionally and so on?

What sort of difficulties does he encounter? Are there things he cannot make language do for him?

What are the functions for which he is now beginning to need the *written* language, and writing as a medium? This is the key question for the child first coming into school. Will learning to read and write make sense to him, matching his experience of what language is and what it is for, so that he sees it as a means of enlarging that experience; or will it seem to be a meaningless exercise which is unrelated to any of his own uses of language?

2. Language and socialization

This topic is closely related to the last; but here the focus of attention is shifted away from the learning of language as a whole on to the role of language in relation to the child as 'social man', and the ways in which language serves to initiate the child into the social order.

Every child is brought up in a culture, and he has to learn the patterns of that culture in the process of becoming a member of it. The principal means whereby the culture is made available to him is through language: language is not the only channel, but it is the most significant one. Even the most intimate of personal relationships, that of the child with its mother, is from an early

age mediated through language; and language plays some part in practically all his social learning.

Bernstein's work has provided the key to an understanding not merely of the part played by language in the home life and the school life of the child but, more significantly, of *how* language comes to play this central part; and hence of how it happens that some children fail to meet the demands that are made by the school on their linguistic capacities, not because these capacities are lacking but because they have typically been deployed in certain ways rather than in others.

The types of social context which Bernstein identifies as critical to the process of the child's socialization were mentioned in section V: the regulative, the instructional, the imaginative or innovative, and the interpersonal. These are, clearly, related to the developmental functions of language as I outlined them: instrumental, regulatory and so on. But whereas I was asking 'what are the key linguistic functions through which the child first *learns language*?', the underlying question being about language development and the nature of language itself, Bernstein is asking 'what are the key linguistic contexts through which the child *learns the culture*?', with the emphasis on social development and cultural transmission. For example, the ways in which a parent controls the behaviour of a child reveal for the child a great deal about statuses and roles, the structure of authority, and moral and other values in the culture.

There are various possible lines of approach if one is enquiring into the part played by language in significant social contexts. One interesting type of investigation was devised and carried out by Bernstein and Henderson, who took a number of specific tasks involved in bringing up a child, for example 'teaching children everyday tasks such as dressing or using a knife and fork', 'showing them how things work', 'disciplining them', and 'dealing with them when they are unhappy', and asked mothers how much more difficulty they thought parents would have in carrying out these tasks if they had no language with which to do it—imagining, for example, that they were deaf and dumb. The answers do not, of course, tell us what the mothers actually say to their children on these occasions; but they give an idea of their orientation towards different functions of language, and there turn out to be certain significant differences which go with social class.

It is not impossible to examine actual samples of the language used in particular instances of the types of situation that are significant for the child's socialization; and to ask what the child might have learnt about the culture from the things that were said to him. For example, a form of control such as 'you mustn't touch things that don't belong to you' carries a great deal of potential information about private property and ownership.

Naturally one or two such remarks by themselves would not tell him very much; but from their constant varied repetition and reinforcement he would learn a lot about the culture of which he had involuntarily taken out membership. And the interesting point is that this learning would have taken place not only without instruction, but without organized knowledge behind it, through the most ordinary everyday uses of language in ordinary everyday kinds of situation.

For a teacher there is the additional question of the role of language in the classroom—or rather roles, since the school is a complex institution and language has many different parts to play in it. The key question, perhaps, is this: to the extent that the school is a new culture into which the child has been socialized (and, as we have seen, this makes greater demands on some children than it does on others), is the actual pattern of language use in the daily life of the school adequate to the socializing task? If it is not—and in many instances at present it almost certainly is not—what can be done to remedy the situation?

A study of the use of language in the classroom may reveal some of the assumptions that are made by the teacher about the school as a social institution—assumptions about the nature of educational processes, about teacher-pupil relationships, about the values accorded to objects, their schemes of classification, and the like—while at the same time showing that the children get no help in becoming aware of these things, or in learning the relevant schemes of social relations and social values. Or, on the other hand, it might turn out that the school provides very adequate means for making such matters explicit: again, not by *teaching* them, but by encouraging and developing a use of language that is culturally rich and socially enlightened. Either way, there is much to be gained from watching language at work in the socializing process.

Points to consider

- (a) What part does language play in the socialization of the child? What types of situation are likely to be significant at the pre-school stage (e.g. listening to stories, having meals, playing with other children)? Can these be seen as concrete instances of Bernstein's four 'critical contexts for socialization'?
- What might the child learn from these situations, about social relations, social values, the structure of knowledge and the like?
- How would he learn these things—from what kinds of use of language (for example, in games with adults, *my turn . . . your turn*, leading to a concept of a particular kind of role relation, with a privilege that is shared and exercised by turns)?
- What demands on his own linguistic abilities, in terms of the developmental functions of language, are made by these

situations (e.g. verbal games, teasing, helping mother in the kitchen, going shopping, competing with other children)?

(b) How do the forms of the child's socialization find linguistic expression in his modes of behaving and learning?

What differences appear between children from different cultures, such as British, West Indian, Pakistani? Between children from different subcultures, such as social class groups within the native British population? How are these expressed in language? (For example, different concepts of family relationships, expressed partly by different modes of address.) [The point is not that such groups speak different languages or dialects; the emphasis should be on the way they *use* language, on the meanings that are expressed.]

What is the significance for the school of the child's pre-school experience, seen in terms of patterns of language use? Are certain ways of using language in school likely to be less familiar to him, and if so can they be made explicit in a manner that is likely to help?

3. Neighbourhood language profile

There has never been any lack of interest in the local varieties of English speech, and numerous accounts of the vocabulary and pronunciation of different dialects have appeared since the Elizabethan period.

Systematic linguistic study of rural dialects began about a hundred years ago, in France, Germany and Switzerland; since that time dialect surveys have been undertaken in many countries ranging from China to the United States. These are designed to show the particular characteristics of the speech in each locality, and to trace its derivation from an earlier stage of the language.

Dialect studies are based on the assumption, which is largely borne out in practice, that there are homogeneous speech communities: the people of one locality all speak alike. The notion of a 'dialect' is defined on this assumption. 'The dialect of Littleby' means the speech that one learns by virtue of growing up as an inhabitant of Littleby. The researcher typically searches out the oldest inhabitant, among those who have lived in the village all their lives, and takes his speech as representative, rather than that of younger people or of those who have moved in to the area from outside, whose speech will probably not be 'pure Littleby'.

Recently, and particularly in the United States, attention has turned to urban dialects; and it has been found out that the traditional concepts of dialectology do not hold good for large industrial cities. In one respect, of course, this is obvious:

everyone knows that the inhabitants of a city like London do not all speak alike. There is not only geographical variation, distinguishing the speech of one *locality* from that of another—South-East London, North London and so on—but also social variation, distinguishing the speech of one *social class* from that of another. (No doubt this was true of Littleby too, if one took the squire and the parson into account.) But the pattern of urban dialects is much more complex than this. Our understanding of the nature of city speech is largely due to the work of one scholar, William Labov, whose pioneer studies of New York speech gave a radically different picture of the dialect structure of an industrial community.

Labov showed up the extraordinary complexity of the social stratification: not only in the sense that there are some very minute distinctions separating different speech varieties, but also, more importantly, that such distinctions may have great social significance in the community. The interesting finding is that, while the typical New Yorker is very inconsistent in his own speech habits, switching from one pronunciation to another according to the situation, and particularly according to the degree of conscious attention to speech that is involved, he is almost entirely consistent in his judgment of the speech of other people, and can be extremely sensitive to the slightest variation in what he *hears*. He is quite unaware that such variation occurs within his own speech, although he may be subconsciously troubled by the fact (Labov devised an 'index of linguistic insecurity' which brings this out); but he responds to subtle differences and changes in the speech of others, and uses the information to identify their social status. Labov found, for instance, that if he played a tape recording of just one sentence to a sample of New Yorkers, not only would those who heard it agree in large measure about what sort of employment the speaker they were listening to would be best fitted for, but also, if he 'doctored' the tape at just one point—altering it in a way which would be equivalent, in London terms, to dropping just one *h*—the subjects rated the same speaker one notch lower on their employment scale. Labov concluded from these investigations that an urban speech community (unlike a rural one) is not so much a group of people who speak in a certain way, but rather a group of people who share the same prejudices about how others speak.

If the townsman, or 'megalopolitan' in current jargon, does vary in his speech habits, the variation is normally not random, but relates to the context of situation. He may switch between a neighbourhood dialect and some form of standard speech, perhaps with some intermediate degrees; but the choice, though probably entirely subconscious, is likely to depend on who he is speaking to, what sort of occasion it is and what kind of

environment they are in—in other words, on the field, mode and tenor of discourse, as we defined these above. That is to say, his dialect switching is actually an expression of register variation. This phenomenon is by no means confined to urban communities; in fact it was first studied in detail, by the American linguist John Gumperz, in villages and small towns, in countries as different from each other as India and Norway. But it is characteristic of the city dweller that he does not keep to one constant set of speech habits. His pronunciation, at least, is likely to vary according to circumstances; and even those who, as adults, do not display any noticeable variation in their speech have almost certainly moved away in certain respects from the neighbourhood dialect they learnt as children.

Neighbourhood speech patterns in the city are always liable to be complicated by movements of population, as is happening in English cities with the arrival of large groups of immigrants, so that even the neighbourhood is not always a homogeneous speech unit. Nevertheless neighbourhood speech has a very powerful influence among children, in their own peer group; it is remarkable that children coming into a neighbourhood from outside, even if they outnumber those from the locality, tend to grow up speaking the local language, so that the concept of a neighbourhood dialect is a valid and important one. It is the language of the children's peer group, in the street, the park and later on in the school playground; and it serves for the child as his badge of membership in the culture. It should be added we still know very little about the linguistic characteristics of children's peer group dialects, which show a number of special peculiarities some of which are significant for an understanding of how languages change.

Points to look for

(a) Is it possible to identify a neighbourhood dialect in your area? Would there be general agreement on what is the characteristic speech of the neighbourhood?

How specifically can it be tied to a particular area? Is it, for example, Home counties? London? South-East London? Catford? Brownhill Road area?

Taking some such locality, perhaps intermediate in size, what is noticeable and distinctive about the speech habits, in terms of grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation? (The best way to find out is to listen to yourself imitating the neighbourhood speech. In doing so you probably produce a caricature rather than a photographic likeness; but a caricature exaggerates precisely the features that we in fact find distinctive. Do you find yourself saying 'a cup of t^hea', 'in the p^hark', with *t* and *p* affricated at the beginning of a stressed syllable? If so this is obviously a noticeable feature of the dialect,

though probably less pronounced than you yourself make it appear.)

How widespread is each of the particular features that enter into the picture? (Some will be confined to the immediate locality, others will be characteristic of the whole city or region.)

(b) Are there noticeable differences of speech within the neighbourhood?

If so: Are there social class differences? Other subcultural differences (e.g. between native and immigrant groups)? Generational differences? Institutional differences (e.g. between one school and another)?

Do all children begin by learning the same type of speech? (If so, this is probably the most differentiated type, the variety that is most specific to the locality in question; and it is this to which the term 'neighbourhood dialect' is most strictly applicable.)

Do adult and adolescent speakers typically use more than one variety? If so, under what circumstances? When do they switch from one to another, and why?

Can the 'language profile' of the neighbourhood be related to the social structure?

(c) What is the relation of the neighbourhood speech to 'standard English'?

Is the neighbourhood speech itself a form of standard English, an 'accent' rather than a dialect in the strict sense of the term?

What are its limits of tolerance? Is it acceptable in school?

Do adults (a) recognize the desirability of using, and (b) themselves actually use, a form of speech that is closer to standard English? If so, when do they use it? How do they learn it? Are there speakers who do not learn it, and if so what are the consequences for them?

4 Language in the life of the individual

It is surprisingly difficult to get any very clear impression of what we actually do with language in the course of our daily lives. If we were asked to make up out of our heads a linguistic record for the day, most of us would be at a loss to reconstruct what was actually said to us and what we ourselves said—let alone *why* we said some of the things we did say.

Yet the day's language makes up a significant part of the total experience of a typical human being, whether adult or child. It can be a useful as well as entertaining exercise to investigate how a child spends a typical day, as far as using language is concerned: what he says, what is said to and around him, and also what he reads and what he writes, if these are applicable. (It can also be

illuminating to look into how one spends one's own linguistic day.)

One technique that has been used is that of the 'language diary'. This is exactly what the name implies: an account of the day's linguistic doings, in which are recorded in as much detail as possible the language activities of the day, showing the time span, the type of language event and some observations on the language used. The record might contain no more than entries like: 8:30-8:35 At the newsagent's: buying newspaper, transactional dialogue, self and newsagent; structure of language events: (a) greeting, (b) transaction, (c) comment on weather, (d) valediction. The actual text might have been something like the following:

- Morning, Tom!
- Good morning to you, sir!
- Have you got a *Guardian* left this morning?
- You're lucky; it's the last one. Bit brighter today, by the looks of it.
- Yes, we could do with a bit of a dry spell. You got change for a pound?
- Yes, plenty of change; here you are. Anything else today?
- No, that's all just now, Tom. Be seeing you.
- Mind how you go.

Children can be asked to keep language diaries, noting down instances of language use at home and in school. The kind of observation they can make will, of course, depend on the age group; but once the concept has been understood it does not much matter what the format is—any form of record keeping is appropriate. From accumulated samples of this kind one builds up a picture of types of interaction among individuals; and this, in turn, brings out something of the complex patterns of daily life as lived in a particular community in a particular culture.

In a community where there is dialect switching, the diary can record the circumstances under which different varieties of speech are employed, using categories such as 'neighbourhood' and 'standard'. Language diaries have in fact mainly been used in multilingual situations, to show how the different languages figure in the lives of individual members of the community: which language do they hear on radio or in the cinema, in which language does one speak to one's wife or husband, consult the doctor, fill up official forms, do the shopping, and so on. But the same principle applies in 'multidialectal' communities, where the language diary helps to make one aware of some of the social complexities of everyday activities. (It is easier to start by noting examples of other people's language behaviour before attempting to be one's own diarist.)

There are various ways of recording language behaviour, which

essentially resolve themselves into four: one can record sounds, wordings, meanings, or registers. Recording sounds, that is, giving accurate accounts of pronunciation, is a task for the specialist, although we are all amateur phoneticians when it comes to reacting to other people's accents, and a few key features can often be identified as indices of dialect variation. Recording wordings means taking down in full the actual words that are used; this can be done with a notebook and pencil, especially with the aid of shorthand, but also, given sufficient practice, in longhand. Recording meanings means paraphrasing and précisising what is said as one notes it down. These three ways of recording language correspond to the three levels of language itself, the levels of sound, of form (grammar and vocabulary) and of meaning; hence each of the three is concerned with a different aspect of linguistic reality. With a tape recorder, of course, one can obtain a 'photographic' image of the whole, and process it at any level one likes; but working with a tape recorder tends to restrict one to the less interesting uses of language, those where the participants remain relatively static, and it is also liable to become somewhat obsessive, so on the whole in linguistic journalism it is probably better to rely on a notebook and pencil, combined with one's own intuition about what is important and what can be left out—an intuition that is notably lacking in tape recorders.

For certain purposes it is very useful to record the actual wordings, particularly in studying the part played by language in the life of a child. Here is an extract from an account of a linguistic 'day in the life of' a two-and-a-half-year-old boy, Nigel; the dramatis personae here are Nigel, his mother, his father and his aunt:

N. You want a **biscuit** <2>

A. Do you want a **biscuit**? <2>

N. Yē

M. Have you washed your **hands**? <2>

A. **Come**, <1> I'll help you <1>

N. You want **Mummy** to help you <2>

A. Mummy's **busy** <1>

N. You want **Daddy** to help you <2>

A. Shall I . . . ?

F. **No** <1> it's all **right**, <3> I'll go with him <3> [They go]

N. [Suiting actions to words] More **water** <2> . . . turn the **tap** on <2> . . . pull the **plug** out <2> [returning] . . . you want to have half of Daddy's **biscuit** and Daddy have the **other half** <2> . . . oh you didn't roll your **sleeves** down <1>

F. Oh you didn't roll your **sleeves** down! <1>

N. You **roll** them <2> [does so] . . . where's the **biscuit** <2> [takes it and eats] . . . the train picture you **tore** up <1> . . . that

was very bad <1> . . . you want another biscuit <2> . . . want to have half of Daddy's biscuit <2> . . . want to break it <2>
 F. All right, <3> . . . this is the last one <1>

The numbers in angle brackets show the intonation patterns, which in English as it happens are an important element in the wording, though they are not shown in our orthography; those occurring here are <1> falling tone, <2> rising tone, <2> falling-rising tone, and <3> half-rising tone. The bold type indicates the word or words on which the tone is made prominent. The conversation is quite trivial in itself, but it reveals a number of things about the child's use of language. Nigel happens at this stage to refer to himself as **you**; also, he uses a tone ending on a rise, <2> or <2>, when the language function is pragmatic (instrumental or regulatory), and a falling tone otherwise. The passage happens to illustrate all the three main types of pragmatic function: instrumental **you want a biscuit**, regulatory **you want Mummy to help you**, and regulatory in the special sense of asking permission **turn the tap on** ('may I?', though in fact permission is assumed and the pattern comes to mean simply 'I'm going to'). Interposed with the dominant motive of obtaining the biscuit are various nonpragmatic elements with their own functions, heuristic (rehearsing a moral judgment) and personal-informative. When one examines the wording closely, there is a great deal to be learnt from a simple exchange of this kind, about the very essential part that is played by ordinary everyday language in the socialization of the child.

However, for many purposes it is enough to record the 'register' that is being used; and here the concepts of 'field', 'mode' and 'tenor' that we referred to in section VI provide a valuable framework for giving information about language use in as succinct a way as possible.

(a) *Field*. The kind of language we use varies, as we should expect, according to what we are doing. In different contexts, we tend to select different words and different grammatical patterns—simply because we are expressing different kinds of meaning. All we need add to this, in order to clarify the notion of register, is that the 'meanings' that are involved are a part of what we are doing; or rather, they are part of the expression of what we are doing. In other words, one aspect of the field of discourse is simply the subject matter; we talk *about* different things, and therefore use different words for doing so. If this was all there was to it, and the field of discourse was *only* a question of subject matter, it would hardly need saying; but, in fact, 'what we are talking about' has to be seen as a special case of a more general concept, that of 'what we are doing', or 'what is going on, within which the language is playing a part.' It is this broader concept that is referred to as the 'field of discourse'. If, for example, the

field of discourse is football, then no matter whether we are playing it or discussing it around a table we are likely to use certain linguistic forms which reflect the football context. But the two are essentially different kinds of activity and this is also reflected in the language. This difference, between the language of playing football and the language of discussing football, is also a reflection of the 'mode of discourse'; see below.

The 'field', therefore, refers to what the participants in the context of situation are actually engaged in doing, like 'buying-selling a newspaper' in our example above. This is a more general concept than that of subject matter, and a more useful one in the present context since we may not actually be *talking about* either buying and selling or newspapers. We may be talking about the weather; but that does not mean that the field of discourse is meteorology—talking about the weather is part of the strategy of buying and selling.

(b) *Mode*. Secondly, the language we use differs according to the channel or wavelength we have selected. Sometimes we find ourselves, especially those of us who teach, in a didactic mode, at other times the mode may be fanciful, or commercial, or imperative: we may choose to behave as teacher, or poet, or advertiser, or commanding officer. Essentially, this is a question of what function language is being made to serve in the context of situation; this is what underlies the selection of the particular rhetorical channel.

This is what we call the 'mode of discourse'; and fundamental to it is the distinction between speaking and writing. This distinction partly cuts across the rhetorical modes, but it also significantly determines them: although certain modes can be realized through either medium, they tend to take quite different forms according to whether spoken or written—written advertising, for example, does not say the same things as sales talk. This is because the two media represent, essentially, different *functions* of language, and therefore embody selections of different kinds. The question underlying the concept of the mode of discourse is, what function is language being used for, what is its specific role in the goings-on to which it is contributing? To persuade? to soothe? to sell? to control? to explain? or just to oil the works, as in what Malinowski called 'phatic communion', exemplified above by the talk about the weather, which merely helps the situation along? Here the distinction between the language of *playing* a game, such as bridge or football, and the language of *discussing* a game becomes clear. In the former situation, the language is functioning as a part of the game, as a pragmatic expression of play behaviour; whereas in the latter, it is part of a very different kind of activity, and may be informative, didactic, argumentative, or any one of a number of rhetorical modes of discourse.

(c) *Tenor*. Thirdly, the language we use varies according to the level of formality, of technicality, and so on. What is the variable underlying this type of distinction? Essentially, it is the role relationships in the situation in question: who the participants in the communication group are, and in what relationship they stand to each other.

This is what, following Spencer and Gregory, we called the 'tenor of discourse'. Examples of role relationships, that would be reflected in the language used, are teacher/pupil, parent/child, child/child in peer group, doctor/patient, customer/salesman, casual acquaintances on a train, and so on. It is the role relationships, including the indirect relationship between a writer and his audience, that determine such things as the level of technicality and degree of formality. Contexts of situation, or settings, such as a public lecture, playground at playtime, church service, cocktail party and so on can be regarded as institutionalized role relationships and hence as stabilized patterns of 'tenor of discourse'.

It will be seen from the foregoing that the categories of 'field of discourse', 'mode of discourse', and 'tenor of discourse' are not themselves kinds or varieties of language. They are the backdrop, the features of the context of situation which determine the kind of language used. In other words, they determine what is often referred to as the register: that is, the types of meaning that are selected, and their expression in grammar and vocabulary. And they determine the register collectively, not piecemeal. There is not a great deal that one can predict about the language that will be used if one knows *only* the field of discourse or *only* the mode or the tenor. But if we know all three, we can predict quite a lot; and, of course, the more detailed the information we have, the more linguistic features of the text we shall be able to predict.

It is possible, nevertheless, to make some broad generalization about each of these three variables separately, in terms of its probable linguistic consequences.

The field of discourse, since it largely determines the 'content' of what is being said, is likely to have the major influence on the selection of vocabulary, and also on the selection of those grammatical patterns which express our experience of the world that is around us and inside us: the types of process, the classes of object, qualities and quantities, abstract relations and so on.

The mode of discourse, since it specifies the 'channel' of communication, influences the speaker's selection of mood (what kind of statements he makes, such as forceful, hesitant, gnomic, qualified, or reassertive; whether he asks questions and so on) and of modality (the judgment of probabilities); and also, in the distinction between speech and writing, it affects the whole pattern of grammatical and lexical organization, the *density* of the lexical content.

In general, written language is more highly 'lexicalized' than spoken language; it has a more complex vocabulary. This does not necessarily mean that written language uses words that are more unusual, though this may be true too; but it means that it has a greater lexical *density*, packing more content words into each phrase or clause or sentence. To express this in another way, written language contains more lexical information per unit of grammar. By the same token, written language also tends to be simpler than spoken language in its grammatical organization; speech, especially informal speech such as casual conversation, displays complexities of sentence structure that would be intolerable (because they would be unintelligible) in writing. Naturally, there is considerable variety within both the written and the spoken modes: there are forms of writing that are more like speech, and forms of spoken language that are very close to the written ('he talks like a book'). But this kind of variation also largely depends on the rhetorical channel or genre, as it is still a function of the mode of discourse. Jean Ure remarks, for example, that the lexical density is determined by the extent to which the language is what she calls 'language-in-action'.

Both the choice of vocabulary, which is largely a matter of the field of discourse, and its distribution in grammatical structures, which is mainly dependent on the mode, are also affected by factors of the third type, the tenor of the discourse: the types of social relationship, both temporary and permanent, that obtain between a speaker and his hearers, or between a writer and his readers (and such a relationship is presumed to exist even if a writer is writing for an unknown public—this is often a big factor in his success), tend to influence the level of formality and technicality at which the speaker or writer is operating, and hence lead him to prefer certain words over others and to pitch his discourse at a certain point on the Joosian style scale.* Equally,

*Martin Joos recognizes five points: intimate, casual, consultative, formal and frozen; see his book *The Five Clocks*, and also the discussion in Chapters 10 and 11 of *Exploring Language* ('Accent and dialect' and 'Diversity in written English', by John Pearce). It is worth remarking, perhaps, that the term 'formality' (or 'level of formality') is the source of some confusion in discussions of language, because it is used in two different senses. On the one hand it refers to the use of forms of the language—words, or grammatical structures—that are conventionally associated with certain modes: with impersonal letters or memoranda, various types of interview and the like. On the other hand it is used to refer to the degree of respect that is shown linguistically to the person who is being addressed: languages differ rather widely as regards how (and also as regards how much) they incorporate the expression of respect, but there

however, it is the tenor of discourse that primarily determines which dialectal or other speech variant the speaker is going to select for the occasion: whether he is going to put on his verbal Sunday best and talk proper, or wear the linguistic garb that is suited to the works, the family or the club.

So there is some tendency for the field of discourse to determine the content of what is said, and for the mode and tenor to determine the manner or style of it, with the mode selecting the particular genre to be used and the tenor determining the social dialect. But this is, at best, only a crude approximation. In the first place the distinction between style (or 'form', or 'manner') and content is largely illusory; we cannot really separate what is said from how it is said, and this is just as true of everyday language as it is of myth and poetry. In the second place, the factors of field, mode and tenor operate as a whole, not in isolation from each other; the linguistic reflection of any one of them depends on its combination with the other two. There is not a great deal that one can say about the language of football, taken as a rubric just by itself (field of discourse), or the language of public lectures (mode), or the language of teacher and pupil (tenor), although these are certainly meaningful concepts, as is proved by the fact that if we hear a recording or read a passage out of context we can usually identify it in precisely such terms as these. But such identification is often made by means of linguistic clues which are themselves rather trivial, like the lecturer's voice quality or the urgent 'sir!' of the schoolboy; whereas in order to predict the interesting and important features of the language that is used we need to characterize the situation in terms of all three variables in interaction with each other. Suppose, on the other hand, that the setting is described in some such terms as these:

- Field:* Instruction: the instruction of a novice
 — in a board game [e.g. Monopoly] with equipment present
 — for the purpose of enabling him to participate
- Mode:* Spoken: unrehearsed
 Didactic and explanatory, with undertone of non-seriousness
 — with feedback: question-and-answer, correction of error

are ways of addressing parents and elders, social and occupational superiors, and so on, that are recognized as the marks of the social relationship involved. Although there is some overlap between these two senses of 'formality', they are in principle rather distinct and have very different manifestations in language.

- Tenor:* Equal and intimate: three young adult males, acquainted
 – but with hierarchy in the situation [2 experts, 1 novice]
 – leading to superior-inferior role relationship

Here we can predict quite a lot about the language that will be used, in respect of the meanings and the significant grammatical and lexical features through which they are expressed. If the entries under field, mode and tenor are filled out carefully and thoughtfully, it is surprising how many features of the language turn out to be relatable to the context of the situation. This is not to claim that we know what the participants are going to say; it merely shows that we can make sensible and informed guesses about certain aspects of what they might say, with a reasonable probability of being right. There is always, in language, the freedom to act untypically; but that in itself confirms rather than denies the reality of the concept of what is typical.

There is an experiment well known to students of linguistics in which the subject listens to a recording that is 'noisy' in the technical sense (badly distorted or jammed) so much so that he cannot understand anything of what is being said. He is then given a simple clue as to the register; and next time he listens he understands practically the whole text. We always listen and read with expectations, and the notion of register is really a theory about these expectations, providing a way of making them explicit.

To gain some impression of 'language in the life of the individual', it is hardly necessary, or possible, to keep detailed records of who says what, who to, when, and why. But it is not too difficult to take note of information about register, with entries for field, mode and tenor in the language diary. This can give valuable insights into what language means to the individual. It will also effectively demolish any suspicion that there are individuals whose language is impoverished or deficient, since it goes straight to language as behaviour potential, to the semantic system that lies behind the wordings and the 'soundings' which are so often ridiculed or dismissed from serious attention.

Points to look for:

- (a) What does the language profile of an individual's daily life look like?

What roles has he adopted, that have been expressed through language? What forms of interaction have these involved (e.g. the role of 'eldest daughter' implies interaction with parent(s) on the one hand and with younger brother(s) or sister(s) on the other; that of 'teacher' suggests interaction with pupils and also, perhaps, with headmaster)?

In what language events (types of linguistic situation) has he participated?

Has he made use of different variants (dialect switching), and if so, with what kind of linguistic variation and under what circumstances?

(b) What is the pattern of register variation?

Can we specify the relevant background features for particular instances of language use?

field of discourse: the nature of the activity, and subject-matter

mode of discourse: the channel, and the part played by language in the total event

tenor of discourse: the role relationships among the participants.

Where are the properties of the field, mode and tenor revealed in the language spoken or written? How far could the eaves-dropper fill in the situational background; and conversely, what features of the language could have been predicted from the structural information?

(c) How much more difficult would it have been for the individual to survive *without* language?

5. Language and the context of situation

Like all the headings in our list, this is closely related to the others; in particular, it overlaps with the previous one, that of language in the life of the individual. But there is a difference of perspective: here we are focussing attention on the generalized contexts of language use and the function of language within these contexts, rather than on the linguistic profile of an individual speaker. The question that is raised is not so much what language means to an individual in his daily life as what the typical social contexts are in which he participates as an articulate being.

As in the last section, there is no difficulty in understanding the general principle: it is obvious that we use language in contexts of situation, and that these can be described in various ways. The problem here has always been how best to describe the various kinds of setting, and especially how to bring out what is significant and distinguish it from all the irrelevant particularities that are associated with specific instances.

This already arises in the treatment of register, as a problem of what Ellis calls 'delicacy of focus'. Suppose, to take a trivial example, that the field of discourse is shopping: do we characterize this as simply 'transaction', or as 'buying' (as distinct from, say, borrowing), or as 'buying in a shop' (as distinct from in the market), or as 'buying in a chemist's shop' (as distinct from a grocer's), or as 'buying a toothbrush' (as distinct from a cake of

soap)? And since the criterion is bound to be our assessment, in some form or other, of whether it matters or not, we may as well ask whether we are likely to take any interest in a situation of this kind in the first place.

One way of deciding whether a particular type of situation is of interest or not is to consider, in terms of the second of the headings above, whether it is of any significance for the socialization of a child. For example, it is a good working hypothesis to assume that any type of situation in which a parent is controlling the child's behaviour is potentially important for linguistic and social development; and this suggests not only that these situations are of interest to us but also that a certain amount of information needs to be given about them, specifically information about what aspect of the child's behaviour it is that is being regulated: whether, for example, attention is being focused on his personal relationships ('don't talk to Granny like that!') or on his behaviour towards objects ('don't tear it').

Generally speaking the concept of social man provides the grounds for assessing the importance of a given class of context. The fact that a particular type of language use is relevant to the socialization of the child is one guarantee of significance; but it is not the only one—there are other ways in which it may be of importance in the culture. We might for example think of a linguistic setting such as 'teacher-parent consultation', subdivided into individual contact, parents' association meeting, exchange of letters and so on; this may be assumed to be of some significance in an educational context, and therefore the forms of linguistic interaction between teacher and parent might well be worth looking into. Even more interesting are the forms of linguistic interaction between teacher and pupil in the classroom, and in other school settings. There have now been a number of useful studies of classroom language, and these all depend on some notion of the relevant contexts of situation.

Another quite different reason for thinking about 'language and situation' is the fact that the pupil, in the course of his education, is expected to become sensitive to the use of language in different situation types, and to be able to vary his own linguistic behaviour in response to them. The move, in schools, away from a total preoccupation with formal composition towards an awareness of the many different types of language use involved a fairly drastic redefinition of the educationally relevant contexts of situation—a redefinition which was not without its dangers and difficulties, as subsequent debate revealed, but which was very necessary nevertheless. Both *Breakthrough To Literacy* and *Language in Use* (see Bibliography, section I) demand an enlightened and imaginative view of language and situation; because of this, they are an excellent source of insight into questions of relevance. As we have stressed all along, there is no

difference between knowing language and knowing how to use it; success in the mother tongue is success in developing a linguistic potential for all the types of context that are engendered by the culture. From this point of view, if we think that a pupil when he leaves school should be able to use language adequately in this or that particular range of contexts, then those contexts are important even if they do not seem to provide any great scope for linguistic virtuosity or the exercise of the creative imagination. And there is some value to be gained from an occasional glance at those types of language use which are not normally regarded as the responsibility of the school. An example is the language of technical instructions: if one looks carefully (and sympathetically) at the leaflets issued by the manufacturers of appliances, not to the general public but to those responsible for the installation and maintenance of these appliances, one can get a very clear picture of how language is related to the context of situation in which it is functioning—or rather that in which it is *intended* to function: one should always remember that a leaflet of this kind is as out of context in the classroom as would be the gas boiler itself, or whatever other object it is designed to accompany.

These are very clearly questions of register, and we almost inevitably use concepts relating to field, mode or tenor of discourse when we talk about language in relation to the situation. Formulations like 'the language of the classroom', 'the language of technical instructions', are all characterizations of this kind, sometimes relating to just one of the three dimensions, often combining features of more than one. It is, in fact, very revealing to analyse some of the formulations that are commonly used, and taken for granted as meaningful descriptions of types of language use, in order to see what information they provide which might enable us to make predictions about the text; and we can do this by relating them to field, mode and tenor. Anthropologists often use terms like 'pragmatic speech', 'ritual language' or Malinowski's 'phatic communion'; the question is what we can gather from these about the field of activity, the part played by language within it, and the participant roles and role relationships involved.

Some of the terms that typically figure in discussions of language in the context of English teaching are worth considering from this point of view, terms such as 'creative writing', 'imaginative language', 'jargon', 'ordinary language'. These are rarely as objective and precise as they are made to seem. Jargon, for instance, often means no more than technical terms which the speaker personally dislikes, perhaps because he is not sure how to use them. If we try to interpret these labels in terms of field, mode and tenor, we find that it is not easy to see what they really imply about the kind of language used. It is not that they are not

meaningful; but there is no consensus as to *what* they mean, so we have very little clue as to what would be generally regarded as a specimen of such language. What is creative in one type of situation (or in one person's opinion) would not be so in another.

The term 'situation' is sometimes misleading, since it conjures up the idea of 'props', the specific and concrete surroundings of a particular speech event such as might appear in a photograph of the scene. But this image is much too particular; what is significant is the situation *type*, the configuration of environmental factors that typically fashions our ways of speaking and writing.

Points to look for

- (a) What are examples of socially significant situation types, considered from an educational point of view?

How accurately and specifically do we define them? What is the 'delicacy of focus', e.g. school—classroom—English class—'creative writing' session?

In what ways are such situation types significant for the pupils' success in school (as distinct from those that are critical for the child's 'socialization' in general, as in 2 above)? What do we expect to learn from an imaginative enquiry into the use of language in these contexts?

- (b) What are the generalized functions of language within these situation types?

What do we mean when we talk of 'creative', 'transactional', 'practical', 'expressive' (etc.) language? How far is an interpretation of language in these terms dependent on our awareness of the situation?

Can we relate the use of language to the interaction of social roles within these situation types? (The notion that the type of language used—expressive, creative, etc.—is solely governed by the free choice or whim of the individual is very much oversimplified, and leads to some highly artificial and unrealistic classroom exercises.)

Are there 'pure' types of language use, or do real situations always generate some kind of mixed type? (This is a vast topic in its own right. Probably most use of language is neither rigidly pure nor hopelessly mixed, but involves a dominant register and one or two subsidiary motives. *Language in Use* provides opportunities for exploring this notion further.)

6. Language and institutions

Again, this is related to the previous headings; it suggests a further angle on the general theme of language and social interaction. In

4 the focus of attention was on the individual; it was the individual who supplied the common thread linking one language event with another. In 5 we took the situation as the basic construct and used that as the means of relating language events. Here we focus attention on social institutions, such as a family, a school, or a factory; these provide continuity of yet another kind, such as is implied by expressions like 'language in the home' or 'language in school'.

We can think of any social institution, from the linguistic point of view, as a communication network. Its very existence implies that communication takes place within it; there will be sharing of experience, expression of social solidarity, decision-making and planning, and, if it is a hierarchical institution, forms of verbal control, transmission of orders and the like. The structure of the institution will be enshrined in the language, in the different types of interaction that take place and the linguistic registers associated with them.

An obvious example is a school, which is examined from this point of view by Peter Doughty in chapter 6 of *Exploring Language*. Doughty writes:

In the sense that a school functions as a social group within a discernible social context, it is a speech community: there will be patterns of interaction peculiar to the school, and consequently, there will also be patterns of language in use peculiar to it, and those who work together in the school develop common responses to them (pp. 100-1).

The school is a communication network, composed of many smaller networks that crisscross each other and may be relatively fixed and constant or fluid and shifting. Consider for example the question of how decisions are transmitted. One communication network is formed by the chain of command, which might run from headmaster to head of department to member of staff to pupil. The detailed pattern is modified and varied from one instance to another; but the mechanisms are usually linguistic, and can be described (again, on the theoretical basis of field, mode and tenor) in terms of a few recognized situation types: formal interview, tête-à-tête, assembly, noticeboard and so on. It is interesting to follow through what happens in the case of a particular policy decision, from its original discussion (if any) and adoption to its eventual putting into effect, seeing how language is used at each stage and how it signals the social relationships involved. As Doughty puts it, there are 'ways of operating through which one individual indicates to another his understanding of their mutual status and relationship'.

There are also the linguistic aspects of the processes whereby a decision is made, as distinct from those by which it is transmitted. Suppose it is initiated from a level some way below

the level of authority required for its adoption; for example, a suggestion from the class for a visit to the docks. How is this formulated for the purpose of being referred upward for decision, from the class to the teacher, or from the teacher to the head?

The making and implementing of decisions is only one of the aspects of the life of an institution that can be considered from this point of view, taking the institution as a communication network.

The characteristics of one type of institution, and the features that set it off from others, are likely to be revealed in unexpected ways in the language. For example, certain institutions, of which the school is one, are distinguished by the existence of a clientele, a group for whom the institution is originally designed but who are distinct from the members of it, the professionals who, typically, earn their living from the institution. The school has pupils; similarly, a hotel has guests, a hospital has patients, an airline has passengers. (These contrast with institutions such as a family, a club, or a union branch, which have only members; and with those which have a 'general public' with whom they communicate only indirectly and through special channels, such as an industrial enterprise, or a government department.) Here the status of the clientele is largely revealed by the nature of the communication that takes place between it and the members. There is a recognized class of jokes about institutions which lose sight of the interests of the clientele who constitute the sole reason for their existence, centring round the basic theme of 'this would be a splendid place to work in if it wasn't for the . . . (pupils, guests, &c.)'. The reality behind this form of humour, the rather natural tendency on the part of the professionals to regard the customers as an unnecessary intrusion in the smooth running of the institution, is again most clearly revealed through the language.

The school itself, therefore, is only one of many institutions that are of interest from this point of view, as a communication network, a nexus of interpersonal contexts for the use of language. But in one respect it differs from the others mentioned above. Most other institutions of this general type—those with a clientele—serve their clientele in non-linguistic ways. The hospital treats their ailments, the airline moves them from place to place, the hotel feeds and entertains them. In a school, the relation between staff and pupils is essentially one of talk. The whole function of the school is to be a communication network joining professional and client. (Perhaps the nearest type of institution to it in this respect is a church.) Hence an understanding of the institutional use of language is even more fundamental in the school than elsewhere.

Recently we have begun to see some penetrating accounts of the use of language in the classroom, and these will no doubt shed

a totally new light on the nature of the school as an institution, and therefore on the educational process. This refers not only to the teacher's own use of language, but also to the sort of language he gets, as well as the sort of language he expects, from the pupils. The latter are no longer enjoined to silence, as they were once; the communication channels are now two-way. But at the same time there are restraints, and only certain types of linguistic behaviour on the part of the pupils are normally regarded as acceptable—depending, of course, on the context: forms of speech which are not acceptable in the classroom or corridor would pass unnoticed on the sportsfield. This is another instance of variation in register.

Finally there is also the external aspect of the communication patterns: communication between the school and the outside world. We have already referred to teacher-parent interaction; but there are many other aspects to this, which taken together reflect the place of the school in the community as a whole. This also is best seen through attention to the language, which is likely to show up many of the assumptions that are made, by the school on the one hand and the community on the other, about the role of the school in the life of social man.

Points to look for

- (a) What do we mean by an institution, from a linguistic point of view? In other words, can we define it by reference to the concept of a communication network?

Who talks to whom, and who writes to whom, as an essential part of the fabric of the institution?

Who talks or writes to whom as a means of contact between the institution and the outside world?

- (b) What is the special nature of the school as a communication network? How does it differ, in this regard, from other institutions of a comparable nature?

How are decisions made, and how are they transmitted? What are the *linguistic* features of the decision processes?

What types of communication are necessary to, and characteristic of, the life of the school? [These again can be seen in terms of field, mode and tenor: what significant kinds of activity are carried on through language, what is the specific channel of communication in each case, and what are the role relationships involved?]

- (c) Where are the *breakdowns* in communication, and why?

7. Language attitudes

The subject of attitudes to language has been discussed frequently

over the past ten years. One of the early treatments of it in an educational context was in Halliday *et al* (1964) *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (chapter 4), where it was stressed that the reason for insisting on public discussion of attitudes to language was that these can be, and have been, extremely harmful in their effects on educational practice.

We referred above to the 'stereotype hypothesis', and to the fact that teachers often base their initial judgment of a child, and their expectations of his performance, very largely upon his accent. This is already very damaging, since a child—like an adult—tends to behave as he is expected to do: if he is stereotyped as a failure, he will fail. But it is not only in their initial expectations that teachers have discriminated in this way. They have often totally rejected the child's mother tongue, and tried to stamp it out with the full force of their disapproval and scorn. It is unlikely that a child will come out of this sort of ordeal unscathed. When the authors of *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* wrote that 'A speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin' (p. 105), they were actually taken to task in the columns of a woman's magazine, on the grounds that whereas a child cannot change the colour of his skin, he can learn to change his language. This seems to imply that if Catholics are discriminated against, the best way to help them is by forcible conversion to Protestantism.

To reject this is not to argue that a teacher ought to learn to talk to the children in their neighbourhood dialect, a gesture which by itself serves little purpose. But he should be prepared to recognize both his own and other people's folk-linguistic attitudes; and, ideally, to explore these attitudes, taking the pupils into his confidence. The pupils' own experience will tell them that language is one of the many aspects of human behaviour that is judged by others as 'good' or 'bad'; they can be encouraged to try and find out why this is, and guided by the teacher towards an understanding which enables them to see through and behind these judgments. (It is not unknown for the pupils to guide the teacher, in the first instance.) This puts questions of dialect and accent, standard and non-standard, into a perspective. We all need to learn some form of the standard language—it does not matter much with what accent, and there is little chance of the teacher's influencing this anyway—but if the standard differs from our mother tongue, we do not throw the mother tongue away. There are functions of language to which the one is appropriate but not the other. Learning standard English, in fact, is more a matter of learning new registers than of learning a new dialect.

Social man is, inevitably, his own ethnographer; he has his own model of himself, his society, and his language. This model contains a great deal of useful insight; but it is cluttered up with attitudes which may originally have been protective to the individual himself but which no longer serve him any purpose and become harmful if he is in a position to influence others. Such attitudes are difficult to recognize because they are disguised and legitimized as statements of fact. This is why one of the most far-reaching trends of the past decade has been the trend, in education, towards a much greater social and linguistic objectivity and understanding; the approach to language is now on the whole constructive and positive, instead of being largely negative as it was before.

In exploring language, we are very naturally led to explore the folk linguistic that goes with it. An important part of this, as Peter Doughty points out, is derived from experience at school; and the school is a good place in which to explore it. The class can collect cuttings about language from letters to the press, columns in popular magazines and so on, to see what sort of ideas people have; they can note the words that are used to pass judgment on language (*good, correct, wrong, lazy, ugly, &c.*), the explanations that are offered for these judgments, if any (*why* is something said to be 'wrong' or 'sloppy?'), and the particular aspects of language that are brought up for discussion (accent, grammar, vocabulary). It is easy to assume that there must be a general consensus about all such matters, but this is largely illusory: apart from the prescriptive rules that were codified in the English textbooks of the previous generation, which have a very strong power of survival, the consensus consists in little more than a general agreement that there must be a right and a wrong in language somewhere.

It is perhaps worth adding a note about phonetics, especially at a point in history when educated Britons are once again becoming linguists, in the other sense of the term (speakers of foreign languages), as they used to be not so very long ago. In any class where some or all of the pupils 'speak with an accent'—which means the vast majority of the schools in the country—it will be easy to show that for learning French or German or Italian or Russian some of the sounds in their own speech are much more helpful than those of RP (= 'received pronunciation', not 'royal pronunciation', although it could be roughly defined as the Queen's English). In learning foreign languages, the child who speaks RP has no advantages; and it is very disheartening, though not uncommon, to hear children struggling hard to pronounce foreign sounds badly, in good English, when if they had not been taught to disvalue their own native speech they could have used this as a model and pronounced the foreign sounds well and with ease.

The ability to make observations on the speech of the pupils in accurate phonetic terms is, naturally, something that requires training. But one part of this is a training in listening objectively to speech sounds, and in seeing through the folk linguistic jargon of 'pure', 'harsh', 'grating', 'rich', and other such terminological obstacles to clear thinking; and this one can achieve on one's own, given a reasonable dash of curiosity and openmindedness. A teacher who is interested in this aspect of language can then try out the 'stereotype hypothesis' on himself, and see how far his own expectations of an individual pupil's performance do in fact correlate with how that pupil pronounces English. In the long run, we may find that the advantage lies with the child who has mastered a variety of different speech forms, although this would have more to do with register than with dialect. At the very least we can show that questions of accent and dialect can be the subject of rational and tolerant discussion, instead of being used as a means of type-casting human beings into readymade categories and labelling them with badges of inferiority and shame. We tend to treat language all too solemnly, yet without taking it seriously; if we could learn to be rather more serious about it, and at the same time a lot less solemn, we might help to reverse what the *Guardian* referred to as 'the slow slide to illiteracy', and to inarticulacy.

Points to look for:

- (a) What are the most familiar attitudes towards linguistic norms and correctness?
 What linguistic opinions are held by (i) the children, (ii) their parents, (iii) your colleagues, (iv) you?
 How are these attitudes manifested and expressed?
 Are the value judgments concerned mainly with grammar? with vocabulary? with dialect and accent? Is a distinction made between *grammar* (= 'what should be') and *usage* (= 'what is')?
- (b) What is the effect of these attitudes on the relationship between teacher and pupil?
 Do they provide a clue to (i) the teacher's expectations, (ii) the teacher's assessments of the pupil's performance?
 What is the effect of these attitudes on the child's own expectations of the school, and on his feelings about his chances of success?
 What is the effect of his actual performance?

Diagram I: suggested categories of dialectal variety differentiation

<i>situational categories</i>	<i>contextual categories</i>	<i>examples of English varieties (descriptive contextual categories)</i>	
individuality	idiolect	Mr X's English, Miss Y's English	} <i>dialectal varieties:</i> the linguistic reflection of reasonably permanent characteristics of the user in language situations
temporal provenance	temporal dialect	Old English, modern English	
geographical provenance	geographical dialect	British, English, American English	
social provenance	social dialect	Upper-class English, Middle-class English	
range of intelligibility	standard/non-standard	Standard English, non-standard English	

Diagram II: suggested categories of diatypic variety differentiation

<i>situational categories</i>	<i>contextual categories</i>	<i>examples of English varieties (descriptive contextual categories)</i>	
purposive role	field of discourse	Technical English, non-technical English	} <i>diatypic varieties:</i> the linguistic reflection of recurrent characteristics of the user's use of language in situations
medium relationship	mode of discourse	Spoken English, written English	
addressee relationship:	tenor of discourse:		
(a) personal	personal tenor	Formal English, informal English	
(b) functional	functional tenor	Didactic English, non-didactic English	

POSTSCRIPT

The work of the (originally Nuffield, later Schools Council) Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching spanned the period from 1964 to 1971, and provided the background of thinking, experience and practical endeavour that lies behind the perspective adopted here. It is in the light of this experience that 'language and social man' assumes relevance as an approach to language in an educational context.

Language has for a long time been a depressed area in our educational system; and only a serious concern with language on the part of teachers, a concern that is enlightened, imaginative and humane, can restore it to the central place which it ought to occupy if we are tackling the problem of educational failure at its deepest level.

Lately there has been a considerable amount of research effort that is relevant to this theme, often following up earlier ideas that had been neglected; and reference has been made to some of the important books and papers that have appeared. But the basic discussion of how these ideas may be translated into practice will be found in the two sets of materials produced by the Programme: *Breakthrough to Literacy* (Longmans, 1970) for primary schools, and *Language in Use* (Edward Arnold, 1971) for secondary schools.

The title *Breakthrough to Literacy* referred to the child's breakthrough from speech into the new medium of writing. But it is a breakthrough also in another sense: a breakthrough in the whole concept of language in the primary school. The ideas behind it are embodied in the Teacher's Manual, which can be read on its own as a thoughtful discussion of the question of literacy. It was very encouraging that, at the end of the project, the I.L.E.A. set up their Centre for Language in Primary Education, and that the person appointed to take charge of it was David Mackay, leader of the *Breakthrough* team.

It is not unreasonable to claim for *Language in Use* a breakthrough of another kind, this time at the secondary level. This takes the perspective of 'language and social man' and gives it a concrete expression in the form of study units for the exploration of language by pupils within the secondary school range. The accompanying volume *Exploring Language* (Edward Arnold, 1971) has been referred to at many points, and provides

the best discussion of language in an educational context that has yet appeared.

There is another breakthrough still to come, in the training of teachers, who have so far been left to fend almost entirely for themselves as far as language is concerned. Perhaps we may look forward to a time when language study has some place in the professional training of all teachers, and the central place in the relevant specialist courses, especially those relating to English and to literacy ('teaching of reading'). 'Language study' is not meant to imply a diluted version of academic linguistics—a subject which has often been defined much too rigidly in the university context; but, rather, a serious exploration of language from different angles, ignoring the artificial boundaries which universities (like schools) tend to interpose between one discipline and another. The exploration of language cannot be neatly classified as natural science, social science, humanity or fine art; it takes something from each of these world views. If we claim that language has a key place in the processes of education, this is not only for the obvious reason that it is the primary channel for the transmission of knowledge, but much more because it reflects, as nothing else does, the multi-level personality of man.

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NOTES

NOTES

The teaching of the English language in schools, and in colleges of education and further education, has attracted widespread interest in the last few years, and great advances have been made in the quality of material prepared for teacher and pupil. This series of papers, which results from the stimulating work done by the Schools Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching at University College London (1967-71), embodies the development of the new ideas and new approaches in this most central 'subject' of all – our own language.

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